BORZOI
BOOKS

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GATES
OF LIFE

THE
BORZOI *POCKET* BOOKS

A POPULAR EDITION OF SOME OF THE BEST BOOKS OF OUR OWN AND OTHER AGES.

THE TITLE PAGE HAS BEEN DESIGNED BY ELMER ADLER.

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GATES *of* LIFE

by

EDWIN BJÖRKMAN

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ALFRED·A·KNOPF

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MANUFACTURED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

To

CHARLES S. PETERSON

True American, true Swede, true friend.

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PART ONE

I

KEITH was still a small boy when he formed a picture of life as a continuous passage through an endless succession of walls. Each new wall promised to be the last one, beyond which lay the open country—with horizons unbounded by any more walls. In each wall there was somewhere a gate that could not be detected at first. Nor was it enough to find the gate. Unless a key could be found as well, the gate remained closed and the wall could not be passed. Sooner or later, however, the glorious conjunction of key and lock would be reached. A moment of intense suspense followed while the key was turning about—a moment representative of life's highest possibilities—and then the gate would fly open. And always with the same disheartening result. The space disclosed might be wide or narrow, inviting or repulsive, clear or strewn with obstacles: in every case the eager eye of the passer through the gate would ultimately rest upon another seemingly gateless wall.

The longer he lived, the more true this picture of life seemed to Keith. For years he tried to doubt its final validity. Perhaps, he thought, the trouble rested with himself and with his manner of picking the gate that never led him to anything but restraint of a slightly different character. Perhaps he did not look hard enough. Perhaps he just missed the right gate,

the master gate, the last one beyond which no more soul-cramping walls would be found.

But all hope had to be abandoned as the years passed by. He compared notes with other seekers after the same unattainable goal, and their experiences confirmed his own. Many gates there might be. But not one had been found, so far as he could learn, that did not lead to another one beyond. And the number of gates in front of each seeker after unlimited freedom always proved too many for his endurance, so that sooner or later he gave up the search and settled with real or simulated contentment on a narrow space that to him became the goal of life.

As the years passed by, from childhood to boyhood, from boyhood to youth, from youth to manhood, the logical mind of Keith grew more and more impatient with that mysterious something within himself that still clung to the illusion of a final gate with no walls beyond. He fought it bitterly as a shameful weakness in his own nature, and at last he was no longer conscious of any part of his own self that did not accept the inevitable conclusion. Even then, however, he did not cease to look for the next gate. Even then the grating of the key in the lock brought his heart to a momentary standstill as his entire being seemed concentrated in that first glance through the newly opened gate. But to keep up the zest of the search, he turned the full force of his attention on the walls themselves rather than on the intervening spaces.

What mattered, he said to himself, was not to get beyond the walls, for that was plainly impossible, and might not prove desirable if found possible, but to discover that each new wall was a little lower than its

predecessor, and stood a little farther off, so that to this extent the illusion of freedom became enhanced. To the reduction in the height of the enclosing walls, and to the gradual extension of the spaces between them, he gave the name of progress. It was in progress, he told himself, that man found his only true aim and reward.

But when he reached that far, he had almost forgotten the day, years and years ago, when leaving school to earn a living for himself implied the opening of a gate so high and so wide that there could be no question about the perfect freedom of the life lying beyond it.

II

AT first glance the difference of the new world to which that momentous step introduced him was great enough to give him the illusion of all life lying before him.

There were no morning prayers at a stated hour, the non-observance of which was held a crime; no teachers to call the roll, give out lessons and enforce unwavering attention through long and tedious hours on an uncomfortable bench; no bothersome books to carry back and forth twice a day; no lessons to be learned at home when at last the school day had come to an end; no marks to be shown at home for a little grudging praise or unstinted additional disapproval; no other boys to watch with envy, or fear, or futile yearning.

Instead he had a general impression of unrestraint

that was much increased by the peculiar temperament and habits of the master he had undertaken to serve. No one supervised his arrival in the morning, and often he was left to close the place at night in the same masterful solitude. A set of office keys rested in his own pocket, and for a long time the weight of them seemed the sweetest burden imaginable—until one day that illusion was gone, too. Often he spent whole mornings or afternoons in undisturbed loneliness, with no one but himself to consult as to what he should do or refrain from doing.

It was a little slow at times, but there were compensations. If the novelty of his new duties threatened to pall on him, or if he had roamed to his heart's content through the wonders of the stock-room, with its variegated store of buttons and ribbons and buckles and textiles of many kinds, there was always a book waiting for him in the left-hand top drawer of the tall desk in front of which he perched on a stool so high that for months he had to use the rungs between its legs to get up on it. If steps were heard in the hall outside, the book slipped easily back into the drawer, and Keith seemed just to be looking up from a big copy-book which he had been indexing all the time.

Whether, in the long run, it was good for the boy to be left so largely to his own control, with practically no discipline enforced so long as he did not leave the office, must be held doubtful. But at the time, and for a time, it was probably what he needed, and certainly what he wanted. It conveyed a sense of mastery over himself that was wholesome up to a given limit, no matter how illusory it proved in the end. Time and

again he felt as if some dreadful load had been removed from his back, and the long lonely hours gave him a helpful chance to vegetate without losing the sense of profitable employment. He could be lazy not only without being reproached for it, but without being aware of it. And for quite a while he prospered under a régime that seemed as if designed for his particular case.

When, on that late June day toward the end of his fifteenth year, Keith first entered the wholesale office of Herr A. W. Brockhaus, he was still far behind his age in bodily development—a tiny mite of a boy with a lot of light hair slicked close to his head and a pair of brown eyes as lively as those of a mouse. When, less than a year later, he was confirmed as a member of the Established Lutheran Church, he had grown a foot taller and could escort his mother properly through the streets, with her left hand resting lightly on his chivalrously hooked right arm. And thus to escort her was with him still a matter of highest pride and joy.

III

THE fact that Herr Brockhaus was a *grosshandlare,* a merchant doing a wholesale business only, was a source of great satisfaction to Keith. Young as he was, and sadly inexperienced as he was in most worldly matters, sundry bitter experiences had helped to make him keenly conscious of the various degrees of social respectability. Had Herr Brockhaus kept a store and sold goods at retail,

Keith's own status would have suffered accordingly, although his duties and emoluments might have been exactly the same.

As it was, Keith's position did not seem to offer much cause for self-inflation. There was no one below him but the highly independent young woman who came every morning to dust and sweep, and a besotted ex-soldier who dropped in at uncertain hours to carry off packages and help with any more heavy labour that might be required. Some people actually intimated that Keith was nothing but an office boy, but he knew better. In the course of the years he had made more than one visit to the bank where his father worked, and he was well aware of the distinctions separating the clerical force from employés of a still lower order.

Of course, he was not yet a full-fledged *kontorist*, or wholesale clerk, but that would come in the natural order of things. In the meantime his officially recognized title was that of volunteer, which had a polite sound and a military connotation besides. Furthermore, he had a salary of 120 *kronor*—or about $32—a year, while most boys in similar positions had to work at least a year for nothing, and some of them actually paid for a chance of becoming practically acquainted with the duties of what they insisted on regarding as a profession rather than a trade.

The satisfaction derived by Keith from these facts was twofold. In the first place it was general and related to the social scheme as a whole, while, in the second place, it was special and concerned with the domestic hierarchy of which he formed a more intimate part. While he was at the very foot of the social ladder, there was no unbridgeable gap between him

and the top, where sat in solemn state all those who, like Herr Brockhaus, were entitled to be addressed as *grosshandlare*. There was no reason why Keith himself should not boast that proud title some day. Had he been an office boy, nothing but a miracle could have brought about such a consummation. Then he would have been on a different ladder, having no connection with the one he had now begun to climb. Then he would have been in the same class as his own father. And that is where the second source of his satisfaction came in.

Keith was a good deal of a snob. To deny it would be useless. And his snobbishness did not even spare his own parents. The world about him had seen to that. Once, during his first school year, a promising friendship with another boy had come to a sudden end under parental compulsion because, like Herr Brockhaus, that boy's father was a *grosshandlare,* while Keith's father was nothing but a *vaktmästare,* a bank messenger—little better than a *dräng,* or hired man, as Keith's mother once expressed it in a moment of more than usually bitter pessimism. It was to escape such an existence far below what was recognized as "socially possible" that the mother had insisted on having Keith sent to a public school of the higher grade. And from his mother Keith had inherited or otherwise obtained a determination in regard to this one point which, in later years, made him face starvation rather than attempt any kind of work that could possibly be classed as menial.

Love is such a very vague and doubtful term. We use it so recklessly and in so many mutually unrelated senses. But this very uncertainty of definition and

limitation has become an integral part of the word in its modern use. Accepting it as we find it, we may safely say that Keith loved his parents, and particularly his weak, mercurial, exacting mother, while for his father he entertained a respect that see-sawed incessantly between resentful fear and reluctant admiration—and always with an undertone of strange, unappeasable yearning. On the surface, Keith accepted his parents as an inevitable part of his natural environment, and if he criticized them, he did it in the same spirit as when he found fault with the weather on his way to the office some gloomy autumn morning.

Yet his attitude toward them was unconsciously not only critical, but increasingly depreciatory. There was something within him that more and more clearly charged them with having failed, and with having, thereby, robbed him of chances that otherwise might have been his. At the best, they represented a starting point for his own career—not as good as it might have been, but the only one available—and it seemed his duty as well as his right to leave that point as far behind as possible. What he felt toward his parents was probably impatience more than anything else, and it was this feeling that prompted a large part of the satisfaction with which he now contemplated his new position on a social level beyond any one attained by those two whose loving labours had helped him to get there.

IV

IT took Keith only a few minutes to walk from his home in the lane between East Long Street and the Quay to the office on West Long Street—a narrow, endless, casually curving gorge bordered by massive old stone buildings five and six stories high. Once the main artery of the little island that encompassed the original city of Stockholm, it was still a street of considerable commercial importance. One or more shops occupied the ground floor of every building, tempting youthful eyes with all sorts of desirable things, from pastries to jewelry. The second and third stories were mostly devoted to offices and salesrooms, wholesale and retail. Those who worked and earned in the lower stories, frequently lived and spent in the upper ones, so that home and shop or office tended to overlap. In other words, "the good old times" had not yet come to an end in a whirl of modern efficiency when Keith first began to make his daily pilgrimage to that office on West Long Street.

It was a street full of historic interest, very solid and cramped and reminiscent of bygone days when every city was a fortress and its dwellers huddled as close as they could for common protection. Many buildings dated back to the time when Swedish armies were tramping back and forth across the continent in vain search of empire. Here and there could be seen huge ancient doorways of stone, curiously ornamented and opening mysteriously on dark and damp and forbiddingly alluring interiors. But to the past and what

remained of it Keith gave small attention as he trudged twice daily to and from the office which to him represented something much more tangible than vanished dreams of empire—namely freedom and novelty. The freedom was only comparative, like all other human things and circumstances, and the novelty would wear off soon enough, but for the time being this did not count. Keith was still a child, and like a true child he lived intensely and exclusively in the passing moment.

The business quarters of Herr Brockhaus, wholesale dealer in tailor's supplies, occupied three rooms on the third floor of a particularly old and gloomy building. They faced the street, to be sure, but otherwise they might have suggested to a more sophisticated observer than Keith that a wholesale business may be conducted on a very small scale indeed. Two of them were tiny even for that overcrowded part of the city, and while the third one was large enough as a setting for Keith, it made the tall and portly Herr Brockhaus seem slightly out of drawing, so to speak.

That relatively large room, which was the first one to be entered from the stair landing, formed the office proper. There, between the two windows, stood the large double desk of which Herr Brockhaus occupied one side and Keith the other. Ensconced on top of his high stool in front of that impressive desk, with its array of ledgers and copy-books and stationery, Keith felt the equal of the proudest tailor in town. Unfortunately most of the customers that trickled into the office wished to look at goods, and the moment Keith descended from his clerkly vantage point to conduct the visitor into the stock-rooms within, his minute

size exposed him to the ridicule of men who seemed to regard the presence of a mere child in such a place as an affront to themselves and a reflection on the business of Herr Brockhaus. They did not mean to be unkind, but they could not help showing their belief that such a small boy could not be expected to know much about such an important and intricate subject as tailor's supplies.

There they made a mistake, however. One of Keith's most characteristic qualities was an almost morbid susceptibility to the challenge of a new problem. And in this case the problem had an additional fascination. To Keith those boxes and cartons and packages that filled the shelves of the stock-room had taken the place of other playthings. They could be arranged and re-arranged with as much satisfaction as tin soldiers. Studying the patterns exposed on the front of every box was like reading books—that is, until the patterns became boringly familiar. For months Keith spent in those inner precincts all the time he dared to spare from the copying of letters and bills, the addressing of envelopes, and the indexing of copy-books. He dusted with something like passion. He revised the entire plan of arrangement so as to make each kind of supplies more easily accessible. He introduced something like logic where until then had reigned mere expediency. He lived on numbers and tried even to interest his parents and Aunt Gertrude in their subtle significances, though with no appreciable success.

As a result of this enthusiasm, the first summer was hardly over before Keith knew more about the stock than Herr Brockhaus himself, so that when the latter

wanted to get at something quickly, he asked the boy instead of looking for it himself. In a spell of more than ordinary exultation, Keith figured out that the buttons and ribbons alone comprised more than four thousand different patterns and sizes. Each of these was designated by a separate number that served to identify it on the bills as well as on the sample charts. Every such number was firmly established in Keith's brain so that, at the mention of it, he could tell the exact kind and size wanted and the manufacturer from which the goods in question emanated. He could walk blindfolded to the shelves and, after a little groping, pick out the desired item. He knew also what purpose everything served, so that he was perfectly at ease with the customers, if only they themselves knew what they wanted. Few of them did, however, and no sooner did this fact become evident than Keith lost his assurance. He was a splendid stock clerk, but a miserable salesman. The idea of persuading another person into doing what he did not particularly desire was not only foreign to him, but actually repulsive. There was a lesson in this, but Keith was not yet capable of reading it, and there was no one else on hand to elucidate it.

All Keith knew in those early days was that he liked certain things and disliked others. Indexing the copy-books was a burden to him from the start and always remained so, and had Herr Brockhaus been a more exacting employer, the boy would probably have suffered for never being up to date with this particular task. On the other hand he rather liked to pack and soon developed great skill at it. Here the neatness and orderliness implanted at home stood him in ex-

cellent stead. For a while Herr Brockhaus himself would pick out the goods to be sent away and wrap them into a solid package, or stow them in a box with the least possible wasting of space. The combination of such incompatibles as a small quantity of velvet and a number of angular boxes made the task anything but easy. Yet Keith acquired the art of packing with astonishing rapidity, and very soon he could produce a package that compared favourably with the best achievements of the impeccable Herr Brockhaus himself. To an outsider with more experience it might have seemed queer that an employer who did not protest when the indexing of bills and letters fell days behind should be so particular about the manner of tying the string around a package. But to Keith just then it was hard to imagine Herr Brockhaus as suffering from any sort of imperfection. Yet there was one thing about him that made Keith a little uneasy from the first. It was a fundamental matter, too, for it concerned the very character of the business in which Herr Brockhaus was engaged.

V

WHY a man of Herr Brockhaus' imposing exterior should have chosen to specialize in tailor's supplies was a puzzle to Keith, in whom the traditional disrespect for the trade thus catered to had been abnormally strengthened by paternal threats on various occasions when he had failed to display the expected degree of manliness. For years the possibility of being apprenticed to a tailor was one

of his life's nightmares. He had never believed that it might come true, but nevertheless it had the power of making his existence miserable at times. Speculation on the forces ruling human destinies was still foreign to him, or he would probably have noticed how thoroughly in keeping with their favourite form of irony it was that, after all, he should have become connected with the dreaded and despised trade. He sought consolation in the fact that this connection was only indirect, and that, as he pointed out to Aunt Gertrude on one of his numerous visits to the little jewelry shop on the ground floor, it implied a distinct superiority to the trade itself.

A more satisfactory defence against any inferiority suggested by the nature of his work should have been found in the willingness of a man like Herr Brockhaus to engage in such a business. But this line of reasoning was not acceptable to Keith, whose ideal of manhood was largely dependent on his long preference for tin soldiers to other toys, and who thought that Herr Brockhaus came very near being an embodiment of that ideal. Nothing was needed but a uniform to turn Herr Brockhaus into a typical officer. He was tall, although not quite so tall as he appeared from Keith's own lack of stature, and well built to boot. His features were regular and cleancut. Thick eyebrows, that probably would grow bushy in time, overshadowed a pair of steel-grey eyes that took on a peculiarly cold look in moments of disapproval. But the most striking feature of his decidedly handsome face was a pair of most impressive moustaches. They absolutely captured Keith's young heart, filling him with a sort of tender envy and serving to inspire his

first conscious aspiration at manhood. Under the pressure of a much restricted childhood he had often wished to be grown up, of course, but this was something different. The former feeling represented merely an escape. The new one amounted to an ambition, and it was no less fervent because he knew so little as yet about its inner implications.

It was the moustaches Keith found so incompatible with the selling of ribbons and buttons that the acceptance of this relationship proved objectionable even for purposes of self-defence. He brooded over it with a sort of hungry passion that craved appeasement lest all his life be found an empty bubble. It even set him asking questions concerning the antecedentia of Herr Brockhaus and the circumstances that had led him to the point where their paths crossed. For a long time this quest remained hopeless because he did not know where to look for information. Then Keith learned that Mathilda, the close-lipped and pietistic young woman who visited the office every morning to clean and dust and scrub, did occasional service at Herr Brockhaus' home as well and seemed to have known him for a long time. Mathilda was anything but talkative on subjects not related to religion, but Keith clung like a leech when his interest was thoroughly aroused, and Mathilda was human in spite of her piousness. It tickled her vanity to show her greater familiarity with the affairs of their common master.

The father of Herr Brockhaus, Keith learned, had been a grocer, beginning life very much as did his own father, but with the additional handicap of being a foreigner. Yet he had advanced steadily and had

finally developed a business of his own so prosperous that it enabled him to leave behind a considerable fortune to be divided between his two sons. These facts suggested comparisons of a confusing nature. They helped to make Keith feel rather superior to his own father, and yet they were distinctly humiliating. Next Keith learned to his still greater bewilderment that his employer, on the death of his father, had actually continued the paternal business for a time, but only to fail miserably. A compromise had been arranged with his creditors, and he had managed to save a small part of his inheritance, but not enough to make him independent. So he had to look for a way to make his capital fruitful, and a chance reference to a "good opening" in tailor's supplies seemed to have determined his choice. Now Herr Brockhaus was engaged in making the most of that opening.

After considerable brooding over these interesting circumstances, Keith concluded that Herr Brockhaus was too good not only for the grocery business, but for any business at all, wholesale or retail. This conclusion was greatly strengthened by overheard snatches of conversation between the employer and friends of a similar type who dropped in from time to time. Most interesting among these was Alrik Kjellin, a young gentleman of immaculate appearance and great worldly wisdom. He lived at the corner of St. John's Lane and the Quay, in the very house so sweetly and painfully familiar to Keith as the former dwelling-place of his childhood's dearest chum, the aristocratically elusive George Murray. And Keith further discovered that this was the young man from whom he had once inherited some outgrown clothes. This dis-

covery was sufficiently embarrassing to make him blush every time Herr Kjellin entered the office, although it seemed quite safe to assume that the latter had no idea of where that lot of cast-off clothing had finally landed.

The talk of those men hardly ever touched business, but dealt exclusively with subjects of a social nature—drinking bouts, card parties, adventures with women, excursions to suburban inns, operas and concerts. Sometimes they remembered the presence of the boy and dropped into discreet undertones that were more suggestive than their open speech. More frequently they went right on as if he had not been there. But even then he understood very little of what he heard. Then, too, their tones carried more meaning than the words themselves, and they filled Keith with a vague restlessness that seemed somehow to connect with certain intimate childhood experiences which he was striving hard to forget.

The life of which the boy caught stray glimpses in this manner was too strange to be intelligible to him. It had no relation to anything with which he was familiar. Even his promiscuous reading offered him no help in this respect, though gradually he discovered that a certain kind of books, toward which he was beginning to turn with a strangely questioning interest, were rendered more significant by echoes of the talks overheard at the office. At the time, however, the one thing he gathered definitely was that, if Herr Brockhaus dealt in tailor's supplies, it was only by force of necessity, and not because there was any natural connection between his soul and those commonplace commodities. His soul seemed more occupied with music

than with anything else, women not excepted. He had a good voice, sang eagerly, and belonged to several fashionable societies that made a specialty of choral singing. Little by little Keith began to suspect that his employer's attitude toward business was very much what his own had been to school—as something that had no lasting connection with one's own real life.

There was much to confirm such a view. In spite of his commanding exterior and occasional sharpness, Herr Brockhaus was remarkably easy-going in the office, and the one plausible explanation seemed to be that he did not care enough. In his own fashion he was as much a boy as Keith, and so the latter, almost from the start, received a false impression of what business implies and demands. For a time it made his life easier, but in the long run it was bound to have a serious influence on his new career.

In all direct contacts with the boy, Herr Brockhaus showed a slightly ironical kindness that first impressed Keith as very refined and then began increasingly to provoke him. Back of the elder man's patronizing friendliness seemed to lie an aloofness so determined that the slightest attempt at intimate approach was rendered unthinkable. For a long time Keith hardly noticed it because of his own preoccupation with all the novel things surrounding him, but no sooner had he become conscious of it than he began to ascribe it to a sense of contempt that, he thought, could only be dictated by the humbleness of his own origins. It is possible, however, that the still unshaped, yet at bottom already determined personality of Keith baffled Herr Brockhaus as much as the latter piqued and baffled the boy. The upshot of it remained the same,

namely that no real contact, emotional or intellectual, was ever established between those two human beings who spent day after day in such close physical proximity within the narrow confines of the little office on West Long Street.

VI

DOWN in the little jewelry shop on the ground floor sat Aunt Gertrude with her lace work or embroidery that never seemed to end. She sat in a big arm chair back of the long counter, her place in the corner nearest the window being chosen so that she could watch both the street and the passageway leading to the upper stories. No familiar face passed along the street without being noticed by her, and no one left or entered the house without a shrewd guess on her part about the errand involved.

She had a wealth of black hair that framed her white face and made it appear still whiter. Apart from its striking pallor one seemed to see nothing of that face but a pair of very big black eyes, lustrous and restless and hungry, that turned incessantly from the street to the person with whom she was talking and back to the street again. At the bottom of those deep-set eyes Keith seemed to detect something that he could not put into words, but that stirred and disconcerted him unspeakably. It was as if their glance never quite focused what was in front of them, but passed beyond to something unseen by others—to something having an existence only in Aunt Gertrude's own dreams.

She was in her accustomed place when Keith arrived about eight in the morning to open the office, and she was still there when he left at eight, or later, in the evening. During the day she hardly ever left the shop, her meals being brought down from her widowed sister-in-law's apartment on the top floor. When she did leave, she generally went straight home to the rooms in a near-by lane, which she shared with her aged and angular mother. Her one diversion was to gossip with friends of all sorts and ages who kept dropping in at all hours of the day, so that she rarely was left alone for any length of time. There were customers, too, of course—voluble city ladies or slow-spoken haggling peasant women—but seldom enough of them to interfere with the predominantly social aspect of the place.

Aunt Gertrude was the confidante of every one who knew her, and very quickly she assumed the same relationship to Keith, although at first he had nothing to confide except his joy at being free from school and his interest in the personality of Herr Brockhaus. Coming and going, he always dropped in for a few moments, and sundry errands during the day gave him so many opportunities for additional visits. Every time he entered the shop he seemed to make the acquaintance of one or more new persons. Some of these never appeared again. Quite a large group of others returned regularly and became more or less a part of Keith's own life.

It was in Aunt Gertrude's shop he first met several young men employed in the large wholesale firm that had offices on the second floor and a huge magazine in the rear of the ground floor crammed to capacity

with bales and boxes of coffee, tea, sugar, oranges, almonds, raisins and numerous spices that filled the gloomy arches of the passageway with their aromatic scent. These men were quite old in comparison with Keith—over twenty all of them—and they showed a troublesome inclination to treat him much the same as they treated little Per Gullstrand, the nephew of Aunt Gertrude, when the latter came bustling down from the top floor to the shop. There was one young man in particular, Kurt Engstrand, whom Keith used to watch in a sort of hypnotic state, half attracted and half repelled. To the timid uncertainty of Keith, with its frequent somersaults into silly self-assertion, the quiet cocksureness and tacit assumption of superiority displayed by Engstrand constituted a profoundly impressive revelation. It aroused the same degree and kind of envy in Keith as Herr Brockhaus' moustaches. He wanted to imitate, but the coveted model was too utterly beyond him, and so he simply slumped back into his customary oscillation between equally unsatisfactory extremes.

What probably impressed Keith more deeply than anything else about young Engstrand was the latter's references to his family. His father was employed in some never clearly defined capacity at one of the royal summer palaces, and there were three more sons, all younger than Kurt. Judging by what Keith heard from time to time in Aunt Gertrude's shop—always in the form of quite casual allusions—there never was a more wonderful family in the world. And sometimes Keith fell into morbid wonderings why other young people should have proved so much more lucky than he in their choice of parents. His own were good

enough, taking it all in all, but there was no glamour about them, nothing of which he could boast as young Engstrand was always boasting. And as for brothers—well, having them was another matter concerning which Keith felt hopelessly at sea. The only thing he knew with certainty was that he should have liked to have a try at it so that he might decide for himself whether it was desirable or not.

In spite of the unmistakable interest taken by Keith in the visitors encountered in the shop, he liked still better to find Aunt Gertrude alone and get her talking about old days and people she had known when she and Fru Wellander were girl chums. She spoke freely of those days, and always in a tone of melancholy regret. But no matter how long she talked, Keith could never get a clear picture of his mother as she used to look and act in those days. Soon Keith ceased all attempts to learn anything about his mother's earlier years in that way. Instead he steered the talk more and more frequently to other friends in the little circle of which Aunt Gertrude and Fru Wellander had formed a part. For some reason not apparent to himself he was especially interested in two sisters, Fru Walter and Fru Olinder, who still kept up a connection with Aunt Gertrude. Both had children, and there were girls among them. Keith would meet them sooner or later, and Aunt Gertrude was sure he would like them. And always when any one's children were mentioned, the gentle voice of Aunt Gertrude grew a little bit strident, and that strange look in her eyes became more distant and yearning than ever, so that Keith went home with a mind ill at ease and asked his mother what was the matter with Aunt Gertrude.

"Once she was engaged to a young man whom she loved very much," Fru Wellander said in reply to her son's question on an occasion of that kind.

"Why didn't they marry," demanded Keith in surprise.

"Because the young man died," his mother explained in a slightly choked voice, "and Aunt Gertrude has never cared for any one else since then."

"And that's the reason why she's so queer?" Keith blurted out. For a moment he seemed to see it clearly. Then everything became as puzzling as ever, and he asked without quite knowing what he said: "But wouldn't another man have done just as well?"

"Oh, you don't know . . ." Fru Wellander's smile was sarcastic, but her voice sounded wistful. Then she changed the subject as her habit was. "Yes, Aunt Gertrude is a little queer, and so are most people who don't marry and have children."

Keith looked at her open-eyed.

"But I don't think I shall ever marry," he said at last, a little hestitatingly.

"Oh yes, you will," his mother protested, her tone again belying the slightly mocking quality of her smile. "Sooner or later—like all the rest."

"I do wish I knew some girls," Keith rejoined a little irrelevantly.

"You will," his mother reassured him. "All too soon, I fear."

"I hope so," was Keith's parting remark as he went to look up the book he was just reading. As he bent over it in eager expectation, he felt ever so much older than he had done a few months earlier. The book was by Jules Verne and took him through a series of most

thrilling adventures. Yet he stopped for a while in the midst of a highly melodramatic incident to wonder why there was so little in it about girls and nothing at all to explain why Aunt Gertrude looked and acted as she did.

VII

THUS that summer came and went, and it was fall again. The reopening of the schools took place in due time but Keith was no longer concerned in that event. He was free.

Late one afternoon he was alone in the office as usual, trying hard to keep himself at some routine task, when the door was flung wide open and in stalked a young man of such a novel type that Keith forgot all his manners and merely stared.

Everything about this unexpected visitor was tight-fitting and had a bran new look as if it had just come out of a shop. With an attention to detail rather uncommon to him, Keith quickly took in a brightly coloured derby, a dark cutaway, a large and loud scarf with an equally conspicuous pin, a striped tan-coloured waistcoat crossed from pocket to pocket by a heavy gold chain, a pair of checkered trousers, tan-coloured spats, and sharply pointed patent-leather shoes.

The man's face was as startling to Keith as his dress. It was so pockmarked that it reminded Keith of a map of the moon recently discovered in one of his father's books. Out of this chaos of round scars rose a big, slightly bulbous nose that seemed without aid of added fingers to perform the favourite gesture

of little boys in expressing scorn. Two pale blue eyes were set very far apart and stared abroad with sometimes smiling and sometimes blazing insolence. His lips were unusually large and carried to Keith a suggestion of coarseness that at times was contradicted by an almost childishly innocent smile.

Dropping an elegant walking stick in the corner by the door and throwing his hat on the sofa that stood along the rear wall, the newcomer made straight for the big desk, fished out a pair of eye-glasses attached to a broad black ribbon, fastened these with some effort astride his big nose, planted an elbow firmly along the edge of the desk, and gazed intently at Keith for a full minute without saying a word.

"So you are the new boy," he remarked finally, and Keith, who was blood-red in the face with embarrassed resentment, softened slightly as he caught a distinct note of cordiality in the man's tone. But before he could collect his wits for some sort of an answer, the surprising visitor went right on:

"You have heard of me, I suppose?"

Keith shook his head.

"Of course, you have," the other one persisted, still engaged in a minute study of the nervously squirming boy. "I am Tverholm—Kasper Tverholm, you know."

Keith didn't know what to say or do. The name was new to him . . . no, not quite, perhaps . . . he had seen it somewhere . . . on some of the orders filled by himself under the supervision of Herr Brockhaus. . . .

"Come, come now," the man at the edge of the big desk said in a snappy, chopped-off manner. "You don't

look like a fool. . . . By the bye, what's your name?"

"Keith Wellander," the boy explained with careful emphasis on both names.

"Well, Keith, do you mean to say that you have never heard the boss speak of Kasper Tverholm?"

"I think . . ." Keith began, blushing a shade more deeply.

"I have the doubtful honour of being the only salesman employed by this one-horse concern," the man went on, dropping his eye-glasses and pushing his pock-marked face very close to that of Keith, who instinctively drew back as far as his position on the tall stool would permit. "I have been on the road three whole months, and but for me I don't think there would be any firm left, and now you tell me that the boss has never so much as mentioned my name to you?"

"Never once," Keith blurted out with a sense of enormous relief. Any one was to be preferred to an important customer whose name he ought to know and didn't.

"If that isn't the blank-blankety-blankedest idiocy I ever heard of, I'll let you call me a purple ass and thank you for it," Herr Tverholm declared with solemn conviction as he passed a very white hand several times through his thick mat of close-cropped hair.

Keith admitted, not only aloud, but to himself as well, that it seemed strange. That was the way, however, in which things were done in the little office on West Long Street. If there was anything to know, one had to find it out for oneself.

Five minutes later Keith and the impulsive Herr Tverholm were seated in the innermost room, which

pretended at privacy and was furnished only with a plain sofa, a small round table, a couple of chairs and a big closed washstand. The boy and the man with the pock-marks were talking as if they had known each other a long time—talking business, orders, customers, manufacturers, new supplies, samples. Keith glowed with a rarely experienced sense of importance, and at that moment Herr Tverholm held the boy's heart in the hollow of his nervously fluttering hand.

"Let's send for some coffee and pastry," the salesman suddenly called out. "I haven't tasted decent pastry since I left Stockholm."

Keith's mouth watered, but he said nothing. That his new friend meant to treat was clear, but who should go for it? Keith would die rather than carry a tray openly through the streets—although, of course, one might get it at the bakeshop on the ground floor, across the passageway from Aunt Gertrude's.

"Haven't you got some damned old drunken fool who comes in to do odd jobs," Herr Tverholm next demanded with his usual explosiveness.

"Yes," Keith assented in a new burst of relief. "Andersson . . ."

"Yes, yes," Herr Tverholm snapped. "Where and when and how can we get hold of the old sot?"

"He should be here soon," Keith ventured. "That is if he comes at all. . . ."

Just then a discreet knock was heard at the front door, and after a roaring "come in" from Herr Tverholm, the door opened very slowly and just enough to allow the sidewise introduction of the ex-soldier's speckled face, unkempt beard and ragged parody of a uniform.

The moment he was entirely inside and the door properly closed, Andersson drew himself up at attention, raised two dirty fingers to the broken visor of his shapeless blue cap and asked in a hoarse but not unpleasant voice:

"Anything today, Herr Wellander?"

That was Andersson's little way of currying favour with the boy whose sole suggestion of a grievance that summer had been that, after being Wellander in school for five years, he had once more become plain Keith to all the world. Before a reply could be made to the stereotyped inquiry, Andersson discovered Herr Tverholm. A gleam of hopeful recognition lighted up his watery blue eyes, and once more his slightly trembling hand went up in salute as he said with an added shade of respect in his tone:

"I hope you have had a good trip, Herr Tverholm."

"Hey, old soak," the salesman shot back, evidently pleased. "Get a move on you. We want coffee and pastry for two. But not from the hole in the wall below. . . . I want some real pastry from Krissman's on Iron Square, and plenty of it."

"That's easy as drinking old brandy," said Andersson. "If you let me have enough *pluringar*. . . ."

"Give him a *krona*, Keith," Herr Tverholm ordered in a tone that might have suited Napoleon at Austerlitz or Jena.

"I haven't got it," Keith stammered, blushing this time with disappointment rather than embarrassment.

"Stupid!" Herr Tverholm barked back at him. "Do you think I would ask you to spend your own money? Haven't you got a petty cash account?"

"Yes," Keith admitted without a glimmer of under-

standing. "But that's for stamps and such things."

"Oh, holy innocence!" the salesman chanted with mock solemnity. "Don't you know that it's for anything you may need? That's the way it's done everywhere. Everybody knows, and nobody cares. When I clerked at Hermansson's, we had a feast every afternoon from Christmas to Midsummer and back to Christmas again."

"Yes, that's the way it's done," Andersson chimed in unctuously. "And many a good drink have I got that way."

"You shall have another today," Herr Tverholm announced. "As soon as our young friend wakes up. . . ."

"But I have to account for the money," Keith protested, still incredulous of having grasped the other's meaning. And a thought of his father flashed through his mind as he spoke.

"Of course, you have," Herr Tverholm assented with pained patience. "And I advise you to be careful about having your account properly balanced every night. It saves trouble."

"But. . . ." Keith began again, more puzzled than ever.

"Where's the cash," Herr Tverholm asked with a finality that would brook no more dilly-dallying. "In your desk, I suppose?"

Keith uttered a barely audible yes.

"All right . . . come on, and I'll show you."

He led the way to Keith's desk, raised the lid and took out the little box containing all but a small fraction of the ten *kronor* received by Keith from Herr Brockhaus the day before. Picking out a bill and a

small silver coin, Herr Tverholm handed both to the expectant Andersson.

"Use your legs like a pair of drumsticks," he urged. "I'll explain the rest of the ceremony to our baby here while you are gone."

Andersson vanished with for him uncustomary alacrity. Then Herr Tverholm fished out the black-covered notebook which Keith used to keep his petty cash account, and which until then had been regarded with something like reverence as not only symbolizing a sacred trust, but as also representing his first venture into bookkeeping.

"Now look here," Herr Tverholm mused as he scanned the filled pages of the little book. "First of all, you have the god-awfullest hand I ever saw. Secondly, as far as I can make out from your hieroglyphics, you have bought no stamps since the day before yesterday . . ."

"I have got a lot left," Keith put in.

"Hang on to them," Herr Tverholm admonished. "The longer the better. And now . . . get your pen . . . there is no cause for letting your hand shake like that, seeing that no one can read the results anyhow . . . now, right here . . . stamps, two *kronor* and fifty-five *öre*. . . ."

"Two-fifty-five?" Keith repeated in a sort of daze.

"Exactly," Herr Tverholm snapped in his snappiest manner. "That's half for today and the other half for the same kind of thing tomorrow—or the day after, if the boss should honour us tomorrow."

"But why fifty-five,' Keith insisted, momentarily more concerned with the extra five *öre* than with the transaction as a whole.

"That was an inspiration," Herr Tverholm explained. "It makes it more plausible, and you can put that fiver in your own pocket."

"I really couldn't," Keith gasped.

"All right, Andersson will be glad to get it. Now write. . . . That's it."

Keith had heard about hypnotism. This must be it, he decided. Anyhow, he made the entry for stamps as directed by the irresistible Herr Tverholm, and when the pastry and coffee arrived a few minutes later, he enjoyed the rare treat as if he had earned the cost of it in the sweat of his brow. Once only did his perfect surrender to pleasure suffer a slight interruption.

"If Herr Brockhaus should come. . . ." he whispered, stopping a delectable piece of pastry halfway to his mouth.

"What of it," Herr Tverholm asked. "But I know him . . . if he stayed until four, we won't see any more of him today."

That night Keith went home without taking time for a chat with Aunt Gertrude. All he did was to wave his cap at her through the glass door of the shop. Then he ran off as if he had been in a great hurry.

VIII

ON his way home Keith thought for a moment of reporting to his father what had happened at the office that day. The very idea, however, set him gulping nervously. He dared not even imagine what his fatner would say, and much less what he might do. His mind harked back to a day in

school during his last year there, when—with perfect right, as Keith thought—he had risen to the point of open rebellion for the first time in his life, and his father unexpectedly appeared in the door of the classroom to warn him in the hearing of thirty or more open-eared boys, that he must do better in the future or take palpable consequences at home. Herr Wellander was quite capable of calling on Keith's employer to lay bare the whole story. Would his own word be credited against that of an important employé like Herr Tverholm, Keith wondered. But he did not for a moment doubt that Herr Tverholm would deny all connection with the matter. The end of his speculations was that he kept the incident to himself.

He was in a sad mood when he rose the next morning and thought of feigning illness, but dread of having to spend the day in bed made that idea unattractive. It was almost like being in school again. His walk to the office took him twice the usual length of time. He even stopped in Iron Square to study the dingy buildings of the National Bank as if he had never seen them before. Their forbiddingly bare surfaces and small windows carried a suggestion of prison that sent his mind back to his Uncle Wilhelm, who had been punished severely for using some of his employer's money.

Keith's nervousness continued after he had reached the office. There seemed to be an unusually large number of visitors that morning, and every time the door opened he made a jump as if stung by a hornet. The actual arrival of Herr Brockhaus about 11 o'clock startled him so that he had to retire to the stock-room for recovery. A few minutes later Herr Tverholm breezed in and retired at once to the innermost room

for a prolonged private conference with his employer. From that moment and until late in the afternoon, when both left together, Keith was entirely forgotten.

The next day was a repetition in milder form of the preceding one, and again nothing happened. In the afternoon Keith found himself alone with Herr Tverholm once more. The expectant Andersson showed up much earlier than usual, the elaboration of his salute and the thickness of his speech proving that he had arrived safely at that stage where, to quote his own words, "he could look lightly on grievances forgot"—for a poet had been lost when too much drink drove Andersson to enlistment.

"How abou' shome co-hoffee, Herr Te-ee-verholm," he asked the moment he had sidled through the barely opened door.

"Su-hure, lesh 'ave it, old eat-em-alive," yelled the salesman in delighted appreciation of the other's befuddled state. "As per usual, understand . . . both as to quality, quantity, and source of income."

Protests seemed futile, particularly as Herr Tverholm promptly made for the little cash box and Keith had overlooked the possibility of locking the desk.

With the appearance of the coffee and pastry Keith's qualms seemed to vanish. Herr Tverholm was at his best and charmed the boy by talking to him as an equal in age and experience. A tactfully admiring Andersson hovered in the background to drink in Herr Tverholm's rich conversation, his own contributions restrained to an occasional hiccough.

"On my way up here from Linköping, I had the most provoking experience on the train," Herr Tverholm

began when the coffee had been disposed of, pulling a slender, delicate looking cigar from a yellow leather case with gilt monogram on its front cover. "A woman . . . Oh, by the bye, do you smoke?"

Keith could have cursed aloud at his unfortunate habit of flushing a deep crimson on the slightest provocation, but blush he did, way down on his throat, as he stammered out:

"No, thank you!"

"Wise man," beamed Herr Tverholm. "The longer we delay our little vices the better. But you miss a good deal, old chap. I began when I was ten, and my brother who is now doing his term as volunteer in the Second Life Guards—that's quite a different kind of volunteer, you know, but all kinds are good in their own way, I am sure . . . well, he began when he was only eight, being a regular little devil. . . ."

"Your brother. . . . " Keith gasped incredulously.

"What of it," demanded the salesman a little touchily. "Our father was nothing but a tailor, but the best and richest in Stockholm. Why shouldn't my brother be an officer?"

"A tailor," repeated Keith almost inaudibly.

"Exactly," said Herr Tverholm with a slightly sarcastic emphasis. "But he was as good as nine other men . . . in *every* respect . . . and I regard myself as a far from negligible evidence of his fine qualities. However, we were talking about my adventure on the train . . . the damndest ever, I tell you. I have never felt so much a fool in all my life . . . and that sort of feeling is not one of my specialties . . . particularly not when women are concerned. They do

take to me like flies to syrup, the little darlings, and my only trouble is to get rid of them again."

Keith was beyond speech. He could feel his eyes bulging and his breath come uneasily. He couldn't quite make out whether Herr Tverholm spoke in jest or earnest. Nevertheless there stirred deep down within him a strange feeling of shame and repulsion, as if he had witnessed an act of brazen exposure on the part of an otherwise decent and far from unattractive person.

"But this one was so exquisite," Herr Tverholm went on, blowing an imaginary kiss to an imaginary vision, "that even I did not dare to think . . . Why, for a long while I hardly dared to look at her . . . But after a time I felt sure she was eyeing me in a manner that . . . Well, I simply couldn't believe it . . . There we were, alone in the compartment, with the next station miles off . . . Can it be possible, I said to myself . . . But I let the minutes and the miles slip by . . . It seemed too incredible . . . At last she put up one of her little feet . . . the most adorable little foot imaginable . . . on the seat right beside me and said: 'I think my lace has come undone; would you be so kind, if you please. . . .' I'll be damned if I didn't blush! And then I tried to tie the lace, and as I fumbled with it and noticed things a little above that superb little foot . . . things no less adorable . . . I was thinking at a rate of about seven million thoughts to the second . . . And just then the damned locomotive began to scream, and in another minute we stopped . . . She pulled back her foot, picked up her handbag, and had the door open be-

fore I had time to say a word . . . On the doorstep she turned back and hissed at me: 'Idiot!' And that is just what I have felt like ever since. Did you ever hear anything like it?"

"Never," Keith affirmed, quite unconscious of any ironical intent.

"Now you don't need to wait any longer, old fire-eater," the salesman suddenly turned to Andersson, who vanished sidewise as he had entered, his regrets finding escape in a last unrestrained attack of hiccoughs.

Then Herr Tverholm proceeded to startle his young colleague still more. Without a word of preparation or caution, he launched into scathing criticism of Herr Brockhaus' way of doing business. Nothing was ever ordered in time. The stock was never up to date. The samples were never ready in time. The orders were never filled properly. The boss seemed to think that anything would do in place of what had been ordered. The customers were furious. If it had not been for Herr Tverholm's own popularity and unexampled skill as a salesman, they wouldn't have sold a single *krona's* worth that season.

"And on top of it," Herr Tverholm concluded his tirade, thereby giving the overwhelmed boy a clue to the cause of it which even his innocence couldn't miss, "he raises blue and purple ructions because the cost of my last trip averaged twenty-seven *kronor* a day. The men travelling for Hermansson spend . . . But what in hell would it matter if he backed me up with the right kind of service? I might spend thirty a day, and still it would pay him, if he only knew how to run

his own business. . . . Or what do you think?"

"I . . ." stammered Keith . . . "why . . . I don't know . . . it's only three months since I . . ."

"True, old chap," said Herr Tverholm soothingly. "And now I have to run over to the Opera Café to meet my brother, the sculptor . . . a hell of a fellow . . . tremendous gifts . . . see you tomorrow."

He was gone, and a nearly paralysed Keith remained behind to try to assimilate what he had heard that day. No more work could be done. He just sat still and thought until closing time came. His brain was in a whirl. Short as was the time he had been in the office, he knew that some of the things said by Herr Tverholm were true. But the fact of his saying them. . . . Of course, his confidence was highly flattering to Keith, but nevertheless. . . . And then. . . .

In the end it was the story about Herr Tverholm's adventure with the lady on the train that took complete and exclusive possession of Keith's mind. Could it be possible . . . ? And what did it mean . . . ?

Finally, a little after the usual hour, he locked the office and made his way down to Aunt Gertrude.

"Do you know Herr Tverholm," he asked her as he entered the little shop.

"Hm . . . not much," was her evasive answer. "I am told he is a good salesman."

"Yes," Keith assented, "I guess he is . . . at least, he says so himself. But otherwise?"

"Otherwise," Aunt Gertrude repeated, looking with big black hungry eyes at some unseen object beyond her questioner. "Otherwise . . . a blatherskite, I should say!"

IX

FROM that day Keith entertained a secret contempt for Herr Tverholm. He tried to raise an invisible barrier between himself and the salesman when they were alone, as frequently happened, but his effort was not very successful. Herr Tverholm went right on talking as if he perceived no change in the boy's attitude . . . and perhaps he didn't. He had many stories to tell, mostly with himself as the central figure. They were as racy and incredible as the first one. Keith had to listen against his will, and his listening was the more effective because, in spite of the suggestiveness of his topics and his fondness for profanity, Herr Tverholm rarely used any expressions that could offend the verbal fastidiousness of the boy.

Herr Tverholm could work, too, briskly and efficiently, when occasion required, and for the first time Keith was made to step lively at times. Had the impulse come from another kind of man, he would undoubtedly have liked it. As it was, it became the basis of another grievance against Herr Tverholm.

The coffee-and-pastry parties recurred from time to time, but not without a great deal of resistance on the part of Keith, who spent many weary hours devising ways of checking the elder man's designs on the little cash box. Sometimes he succeeded for a while, but always to meet with new defeat in the end. The only certain way out of it would have been to go to Herr Brockhaus with the whole tale, and this Keith could not make himself do. In one respect he had his own

way—because Herr Tverholm knew nothing about it—and that was in keeping his accounts clear of additional false entries. Every week he struck a balance, and this showed a growing deficit . . . amounting to almost twelve *kronor* when, six weeks later, Herr Tverholm started on another business tour, his employer having exacted a promise that the travelling expenses should be kept within twenty-five *kronor* a day.

"If he spent a little less on his damned women," was Herr Tverholm's parting remark to Keith, "I could have enough to make our customers believe that I represent a first-class firm. Therefore, beware of women, sonny!"

It was with a tremendous sense of relief that Keith saw the striped waistcoat, the lively trousers and the pointed shoes disappear through the front door for the last time in many months. Once more the office resumed its former air of peaceful dreaminess. Once more the days became a little lonely and a little slow, but on the whole happy. Once more Andersson slouched in unexpectedly to mutter his stereotyped "Anything today, Herr Wellander?" Once more Keith was sure of being able to make his good-night calls on Aunt Gertrude without any qualms about important confidences held back. The only disturbing factor was the thought of the deficit in his petty cash account.

When Herr Tverholm had been gone three days, Keith formed a resolution and acted on it at once in order to prevent himself from getting too scared about it. With the black notebook open in his hand, so that the latest balance was clearly visible, Keith walked

around the big desk to the side where Herr Brockhaus stood poring over the big ledger.

"Won't you please look it over and see that it is correct," he asked desperately, offering the open book to his employer.

"Some other day," said Herr Brockhaus. "I haven't time now . . . and I know it's all right."

Fate had spoken, Keith felt. He never offered the book again, and it was never asked for. As far as he knew, it was never inspected. The deficit remained, as he could not make it up without telling his father. In fact, it increased, but that was only because, try as he might, Keith would forget to enter small items of expenditure from time to time.

There were moments when the thought of this deficit tormented him much as, at an earlier age, certain childish habits had tormented him after he had read a terrible book about their dreadful consequences. In this case the dread was derived from a thousand utterances of his father's who never tired of telling him:

"Whatever you do, never touch an *öre* that you don't know to be your own."

Most of the time, however, he forgot all about it, and after a while he made this forgetfulness more complete by simply ceasing to balance his account. What was the use, he thought. All receipts and expenditures were entered with scrupulous exactness, but the long columns of figures remained unadded. Still no one seemed to care.

X

AT home everything remained as it had been as far back as Keith could remember. Granny —his maternal grandmother, who lived with them—stuck resentfully to the kitchen as she had always done. The parents occupied the living-room, where Keith joined them for meals. The rest of his time at home was spent in the parlour, which was now surrendered to his exclusive use except when company appeared. There he slept, and there he kept his precious little library, which he was now free to use at night as he pleased. That was the sole tangible change in his position produced by his graduation from school to office. Otherwise his title and his salary made no difference. If he wished to go out after his work for the day was done, he must ask permission to do so, and an hour of latest return was always fixed by parental authority before he was allowed to depart. Any attempt to defy that authority caused so much bother and annoyance that it was far easier to comply.

Nor was Keith seriously tempted into such defiance during the first summer. He was rather glad to stay at home and read to his heart's content what he pleased, and the more so because, by a tacit understanding, he had been made free of his father's books. Among these were several novels by a Swedish woman writer, Emilie Flygare-Carlén, and others translated from the English and the German,

all of which placed the main emphasis of their stories on love between men and women—a subject that increasingly challenged the boy's attention as his aroused curiosity failed to find satisfaction. The only thing he got out of his reading was a strong conviction that what men called love had nothing to do with life as really lived from day to day, in homes and offices and shops. It seemed to him in spirit rather akin to the picnics in which, at rare intervals, he had participated with his parents. There was an awful lot of fuss in advance. Then, after a tedious struggle with baskets and boxes, you plunged for a brief while into a furious burst of forced gaiety. And when it was all over, you always wondered why you had gone to so much trouble for a few hours of fleeting and doubtful pleasure.

Religion, of which he had heard more than usual at home lately, seemed to Keith very much like love, only more so . . . for in that case all rewards had to be taken on trust as due at some future, highly uncertain date. It was all very bewildering, and he had no one to discuss it with, for when he tried Aunt Gertrude, she said, as did his parents, that there were things which no respectable person cared to question. And Keith wanted so badly to be thought respectable. It was the main condition, he judged, for getting anything in life that was really desirable.

XI

"KEITH," his father called out on his return from the office one night not long after the departure of Herr Tverholm.

"Yes, papa," he responded dutifully, but with anxiously questioning eyes. The cash account was still troubling him, and one could never tell where Herr Wellander's rare approaches might lead.

"How old are you," the father asked.

"I shall be sixteen next year," Keith replied, preferring in such matters to be a little ahead of his time, rather than behind.

"So I thought," the father said as if he had really been in doubt. "You know what that means, of course?"

"No," Keith confessed, his heart beginning to beat a little more rapidly.

"That you ought to be confirmed," the father explained with a certain softness of tone that he vainly tried to suppress.

"Yes," said the mother, who until then had watched them silently from her big arm chair by the window, "you are growing up, Keith."

"Do you think so," asked Keith, looking quickly from one to the other. There was an unmistakable request for information in his ambiguous question, but also a suggestion of relieved apprehension. It might have been worse, he thought. As neither parent spoke again, he was forced into a more direct appeal:

"What does it mean?"

"A great deal," his mother answered a little brokenly, "for this life and the next one."

"It has to be done," the father interrupted in a matter-of-fact tone that made Keith much more interested. "You cannot get anywhere until it is over."

The father's conception of it as a social and worldly rather than religious and other-worldly matter seemed so clear to Keith that he blurted out:

"I see—it's like an examination!"

"Keith, Keith!" his mother cried. "How can you talk like that?"

"Well," the father interposed soothingly, "you might call it that in a sense."

The mother looked disturbed for a moment. Then a glow of satisfaction spread over her face.

"Your father is right," she said to Keith. "And you, too. It is an examination that prepares us for a much more serious one to be conducted by the Lord himself. If you take it in that spirit, Keith, you will be all right, I am sure."

A slightly wearied look appeared on the boy's face, as was invariably the case when his mother began to talk religion He had tried so hard to grasp just what she was driving at, and he had failed so miserably that, in sheer self-protection, he preferred to leave the whole subject alone. And here he was—right up against it—with his father unexpectedly concerned in it, too!

"What do you want me to do," he demanded at last, turning to his father as if he had not heard his mother's remark.

"Keith!" his mother broke in with a suggestion of tempest in her voice.

"Now, Anna," the father interceded again, "the boy cannot be expected to see this as you do. But he will learn. That's just what we are talking about."

Then he said to Keith in a tone more suggestive of accepted equality between them than the boy had ever heard from his lips before: "I want you to ask Herr Brockhaus if he will let you be free for a couple of hours twice a week. If he says yes, we'll take you up to Pastor Soop at Great Church at once. There is no time to lose if you are to be confirmed next spring—and the longer you wait, the more awkward it becomes."

"All right," said Keith readily. "I'll ask him tomorrow."

"And then, Keith," his mother put in, "you must promise me to listen with your whole heart to what the pastor tells you."

"Yes, mamma," Keith agreed lightly, running off to the parlour to resume his reading of a novel about a man and a woman who married each other and then didn't like each other, but quarrelled most frightfully, and finally went away from each other in order to part for ever, and then found out that they loved each other after all, and so came together in the end for good and lived happily and contentedly for many years afterwards. There was to Keith a peculiar satisfaction in this story because he hated quarrelling more than anything else in the world.

XII

HERR BROCKHAUS grumbled a little but ended by repeating the opinion of Keith's father, that it would be better to have it over. The boy himself acquiesced as usual to anything not directly touching one of his more marked predilections or aversions. In this case his indifference was a little disturbed by memories of long and tedious Sunday mornings spent in church under compulsion while he was still subject to school discipline. At the same time he could not help wondering at the peculiar attitude shown both by his father and his employer. It was as if they had regarded it as highly important in one sense, and yet, in another, not worthy of serious attention. His mother, on the other hand, continued to talk excitedly of it as an epoch-making event in his young life, and the force of her emotion infected him at times, but only to make him feel the more relieved when he could escape from it.

A week later he was duly installed as a member of the boys' confirmation class instructed by Pastor Soop in a bare and gloomy room somewhere within the lower precincts of Great Church. The leader of that group of twenty-five or thirty more or less apprehensive boys was dark and sombre, both as to dress and natural appearance, with a scowling brow and a pair of piercing black eyes that, in moments of unusual agitation, seemed literally to throw off sparks. Keith's initial encounter with this unpromising questioner proved a pleasant surprise.

"What school," asked Pastor Soop in his customary, slightly hostile tone.

"South End Higher Latin School," replied Keith in a voice that he vainly tried to make firm.

"Oh," said the pastor in a manner showing clearly that he had not expected such an answer. Then a faint suggestion of satisfaction appeared on his face, and when he spoke again, the quality of his voice had undergone a marked change.

"Then," he said, "your instructor in religion was my brother?"

"Yes, Herr Pastor," Keith answered readily, gathering instinctively that this accident was in his favour.

"I am glad of it," rejoined the pastor, fixing Keith firmly with eyes that now glowed with a kindly light. "You and Westman can leave for the day as there is no reason why you should be here while I question the rest."

Lars Westman and Keith were the only members of the class that had attended one of the higher schools. It was plain from the first that Pastor Soop on this account accepted them as on his own social and intellectual level. They were placed at the head of the class and treated with almost deferential kindness. Their knowledge of the fundamental dogmas of the Lutheran religion was quietly taken for granted, and they were never asked a question except when the head of the class needed them as a background for the ignorance or stupidity of some less fortunate pupil.

Toward these other boys the pastor's attitude was mostly one of wrathful impatience. He fought with them as you fight with an enemy who is never willing

to meet you in open battle. They challenged him, and in spite of his rarely concealed scorn, he could not leave them alone. At times there came into his exhortations a slightly wistful note suggesting that a defeat on his part would imply a loss reaching beyond both himself and his pupils. At such moments Keith felt something like genuine sympathy for the struggling teacher as well as a vague interest in that elusive something which lay at the heart of his passion. As a rule, however, Keith was more repelled than attracted, in spite of the consideration granted to himself, and his occasional spells of curiosity never rose to action.

The boys, on their side, showed plainly, although never incautiously, that they realized the mutual enmity underlying the enforced relationship between themselves and the black-frocked man in front of the class. They submitted to his authority, but only just so far as they must, and clearly out of some necessity vividly present to themselves but quite hidden to Keith. All they said and did breathed a spirit of passive resistance so intense that Keith failed to grasp why it did not break into open rebellion. Hardly ever did they show pride in giving a correct answer. When they happened to know anything by rote, they drawled it off in a careless monotone that could not but strike a listener as intentional. And they lapsed into a state of complete mental stupor as soon as a question aimed below the surface of what was given in black on white by the Catechism.

Keith now and then even forgot his boredom to watch them, his feelings swinging incessantly between resentment and a faint uneasiness bordering on dread.

There was something about the manner of those boys, and particularly about the unanimity of their slightly malicious elusiveness, that caused him to shrink as from a menace that was the more real because it couldn't be gauged. He sensed an unbridgeable chasm between those boys, all of whom showed evidences of coming from homes much poorer than his own, and the darkbrowed, scowling man addressing them with the irate air of some old Hebrew prophet. And he guessed that this chasm had to do with social distinctions rather than religious convictions. For this reason it flattered him the more to be accepted by the pastor as one of his own. But quite apart from this pleasant sense of community with one of the parties to that uneven struggle, he could not free himself from a certain contempt for what he deemed sheer hypocrisy on the part of the boys. There were occasions, too, though rare and fleeting, when the fervour of the fiery-eyed preacher's tone, rather than anything he said, stirred the boy's soul to ineffable longings that seemed to make his mother's attitude toward such matters more explicable. At other times, and more frequently, the scorn flung in the faces of those boys made Keith squirm on their behalf as if it had recoiled on himself in some subtle way.

"How can they stand it," he asked nervously of Westman one day when they were leaving the church together.

The other boy, who was only a month older than Keith, but looked and acted much more mature, shrugged his shoulders and paused a while before he replied.

"They're scared," he said at last. "They're a

tough lot, but they know he has got them where they can't help themselves. If he says so, they can't be confirmed this time, and then they'll have to wait another year before they can start working at some trade. That's what they're all keen on, and I guess the people at home are still more keen on having them earn some money. Any boy that fails will be licked by his dear papa until he wishes he had never been born, I am sure, so that. . . . Well, that's the only hold the pastor has on them, I guess, but it's enough."

Westman himself was carefully dressed, carefully polite in his language, and carefully reserved in his manner. Yet there was something behind all that outward propriety that spoke of a strong will and an independent mind. Now and then he reminded Keith of the exquisite and correct George Murray, whom he had worshipped ardently during two whole school years, but the suggestion of resemblance always failed in the end. There was something in and about Westman of which Keith knew his former chum quite incapable. Like Murray, however, Westman suggested standards of refinement that provoked in Keith unpleasant and slightly resentful feelings of inferiority. Nor did he ever succeed in becoming familiar with Westman, although they sat side by side twice every week for many months, and although Keith, to his immense astonishment, discovered that the other's home was in the house next to his own, in the same old lane where he had lived as far back as he could recall. Westman answered with scrupulous exactness any question asked by Keith, but he asked no questions in return.

"What are you going to be," Keith asked one day.

"I think I'll go on studying a while," was Westman's diplomatic reply.

"What," persisted Keith.

"Art," the other boy said with as much unconcern as if he had mentioned theology or medicine.

"Art," Keith repeated blankly. "What. . . ." He came near asking what it meant, but corrected himself in time by asking instead: "What art?"

"I am not sure yet, but I think I'll go in for architecture. Did you ever take a good look at the church? It's a great old pile, I tell you, and I wish I could build something like that one day."

Then they parted. They never had another talk on the same subject. It almost seemed to Keith as if Westman avoided him outside of the class, but he could never make sure. For a time he thought a good deal of what the other boy had said. That any one should consider art an object of study was a little strange in itself to Keith. No field of human endeavour lay more completely outside his limited experience, and everything pertaining to it mystified him as did religion. It did not seem likely that he would ever be able, or care, to approach more closely to it.

What impressed him most about Westman's answer to his question was a certain assurance in the other's manner of speech indicating that he knew what he wanted, and that his knowledge sprang from some inner impulse too strong to be mistaken or resisted. This was much more strange to Keith than the nature of Westman's chosen subject. He searched his own mind over and over to discover a similar impulse within himself, but no sign of it was to be found. Of course, there were things he wanted to do—as reading

books according to his own momentary bent, for instance—but they bore no distinguishable relation to his future, or to a lasting choice of occupation. As a rule, he wished simply to avoid things that bored or irked him, and he had entered the office of Herr Brockhaus not because he desired to become a business man, but because he wanted to escape the school. No matter where he turned, the same lack of compelling motive checked his eager scrutiny. Was there anything in the world he felt constrained to pursue beyond making the passing moment as pleasant as possible? Not one, as far as he could see.

For a brief while this self-scrutiny disturbed him a little, but not very seriously. Soon it was entirely forgotten, and so were Westman and Keith's momentary speculations about art. The winter slipped by very much as the summer had done. On the whole, Keith was quite happy in a passive sort of way. And least of all was he stirred or disturbed by what Pastor Soop thundered to his recalcitrant class.

XIII

AS the great day drew near, wardrobe problems came to the fore and soon took precedence of all other considerations.

Keith declared with unwonted firmness that none of his old suits would do. His mother agreed with him. But when he went on to say that he was entitled to a new suit because he turned over his monthly salary of ten *kronor* intact to his father and rarely got an *öre*

back for his own use, she retorted sharply that his keep cost a good deal more. If nevertheless he got a new suit, she added, it was out of his father's goodness and not out of his own earnings. It made Keith wonder whether his pride did not require him to give up that suit entirely, but, of course, that was out of the question.

Before a word was said to his father, Keith decided to find out the proper kind of clothes for such an occasion. Naturally he turned to Westman as his nearest source of information.

"Anything dark will do," the latter answered evasively.

"What are you going to wear," Keith ventured.

"Full dress, of course," said Westman as if he had found the question a little peculiar.

"Black coat with tails behind, you mean," Keith queried incredulously.

"Yes," Westman affirmed with a slight smile. "And white tie."

Keith's heart sank within him. He knew that it must be the right thing, but he also knew that his father would never permit it. An appeal to his mother's support promised success for a while, as she hated to have him appear in any way behind the only other "gentleman pupil" in the class.

But the father proved obdurate, as Keith had feared. At first he insisted on a common dark sack coat. In the end he compromised on a cutaway. Even then the day might have been saved to some extent, had he not followed his usual custom of doing the ordering for Keith. That settled it.

In spite of his fifteen years, Keith nearly wept when he finally saw himself in the new outfit. The coat was made of blue cloth for one thing—very dark blue, to be sure, but still under no circumstances mistakeable for black. In cut it was a sort of cross between frock and sack that did not resemble anything Keith had ever seen before. And it did not fit very well at that.

From that moment Keith looked forward to the impending event with an indifference that sometimes threatened to turn into actual horror.

What older people read into that event was to him intangible and largely unintelligible. His dress and appearance, on the other hand, were quite tangible things, visible to the whole world as well as to himself. His dread of appearing at a disadvantage beside Westman was another very real thing. The rest of the class did not matter. That they would appear much worse off than Keith was neither here nor there. Even the people in the church mattered only in a minor degree. The main thing, the unbearable thing, was that Westman would be sure to notice his misfit coat, draw certain inevitable conclusions from it, and then never show by word or mien that he found anything amiss.

If the first communion should really prove as momentous as his mother, the pastor and a few other people seemed to think, how, Keith asked himself, could he hope to get the full value out of it under circumstances so hopelessly discouraging?

XIV

ON a sun-steeped Sunday morning in the late spring, when summer itself seemed at the door, Keith walked sedately to church with his father and mother. Curiosity struggled with bitterness for possession of his mind, and it looked as if the latter feeling might lose because it was older and partly outlived.

The church was full of people, and his mother was thrown in a flurry at the thought of not being able to get a seat from which she could watch her son throughout the proceedings. Keith was thankful to get away from her and to join his class in the room where they had received their instruction during the past winter months. There, however, curiosity was completely worsted, and bitterness remained in undisputed sway for a while. One glance at Westman sufficed to show Keith the immeasurableness of his own inferiority. Not only did Westman wear the ceremonial full dress in minute perfection, but the quality and fit of his clothes constituted a revelation in itself. Thus the day was spoiled right at the start, as Keith had feared.

Guided by a strange minister and led by Westman and Keith, the class marched two abreast up the centre aisle to the benches reserved for their use nearest the altar. The girls followed—thirty or forty of them, all in white and carrying flowers on their heads and in their hands. The big organ thundered and fluted alternately until the lofty arches seemed to rock under that storm of sound. Every pew was full. Every

aisle was packed. All were craning their necks to catch a glimpse of the children moving slowly toward the altar.

The impressiveness of those moments broke through Keith's preoccupation in spite of his determined clinging to his personal grievances. All those eyes watching him made him dizzy. As at his first commencement, so now again he seemed to lose his individual consciousness and move automatically as part of a human machine. The organ sounded more distant. There seemed to be a vast space between himself and those watching eyes. Details became blurred. The last part of the way he moved as in a mist, and through this mist he saw and heard what followed. It lent an air of unreality to the whole scene, and momentarily he had a sense of not being present at all.

Finally everybody was seated. The boys were on the right side of the aisle. Westman held the corner seat of the first bench nearest the altar. Keith sat next to him. Across the aisle, facing them, were the girls, one white and flowery row behind the other. At the altar, with his eyes on the children, stood Pastor Soop in white surplice, looking very unfamiliar. A tender, almost mystic light glowed in his eyes.

He began to talk, and his talk was directed to the children. His words, at first slow and ponderous, gathered speed and passion as he went on, but of the customary hostile impatience not a trace was left. He pleaded with them. He talked of sin, and of the pardoning of all sins for which the way now would be opened to them. One phrase recurred constantly, and it was the only one that made a lasting impression on Keith's mind. "Conviction of sin," according

to Pastor Soop, was the most important thing of all, the beginning of righteousness, the first step toward that grace of God which furnished the only source of lasting happiness.

As he went on in a voice that proved beyond all doubt the intense earnestness of his own faith, a light sob was heard, then another. Soon every one of the girls across the aisle was weeping and the contagion was spreading to the boys. Keith could feel the shoulder of Westman heave in close proximity to his own. His eyes were growing dim. The mist about him was thickening. The pastor's voice and words became ever more persuasive. Something tremendous seeemed on the verge of happening within Keith. Mechanically he reached for his handkerchief . . . his throat contracted. . . .

There was no handkerchief in the pocket where he usually carried it. . . . A quick search of other pockets gave the same negative result. . . .

The spell that had begun to seize him broke suddenly. His incipient tears were checked. He breathed more calmly and became conscious once more of himself and his misfit coat. The girls across the aisle, with their faces buried in their handkerchiefs, seemed silly. The boys around him seemed sillier still against the background of their previous behaviour. But they were moved now . . . conquered by their former enemy who was an enemy no longer . . . carried outside of themselves and rendered incapable of further resistance. . . .

Keith wondered what could be at the bottom of it. He had ceased to feel anything. He heard the pastor speak of "a heart given wholly to God" and tried

coldly to analyse the words, in which he could find no meaning applicable to himself. He moved with the rest to the altar ring, kneeled to receive the sacraments, and noticed only physical sensations of taste and touch. Once only, for the briefest of moments, did he experience an echo of the intoxication that had threatened to engulf him a while before. It was when he felt the pastor's hand resting on his head and heard his own name spoken in vicarious utterance of a promise that he could not catch. Then he returned once more to the hard soberness that had taken possession of him when he found that he could not cry because he had no handkerchief to cry in. . . .

The ceremony must have lasted quite a long time, but Keith could not tell whether minutes or hours had passed when, at last, he woke to an ordinary state of mind in his mother's arms that were holding him very close. Her eyes and cheeks, close to his own, showed that she had wept freely.

"My boy, my boy!" was all she could mutter for a long while, the father standing by with a patience not common in him. When finally she came to herself again, she held Keith away from herself with outstretched arms and looked at him as if she might never see him again.

"I still have my son," she whispered at last, "but the little boy is gone . . . gone for ever!"

Then she kissed him, and they walked home in a subdued but rather happy mood, the father a little apart and the mother clinging to Keith's arm. It was the only time she ever did so when her husband was present, and it filled Keith with a sense of awed self-importance through which shot little pangs of inexplicable merri-

ment. Perhaps, after all, something important had happened that day. Perhaps a gate of some sort had opened.

XV

THE Wellanders gave a party in honour of their son that night. Keith was the only young person present. The rest were middle-aged friends of his parents who ordinarily gave him a sense of belonging to another world—a world that he was leaving to create a new one of his own where he could order his own clothes and have them just right. That night, however, they made much of him, although with more of banter in their address than he found cause for, and he felt a little less out of touch with them than usual.

It was quite an affair. The big dining table was opened to its full length and placed where it used to stand only on Christmas Eve. The *smörgåsbord* that opened the repast was of unexampled richness and variety, filling the eager eaters with a sort of fury because they could not hope to sample all of its delicacies. There were bottles, too, of many kinds—not only the *brännvin,* or colourless whisky, which was taken as an appetizer, or the beer that came a little later, but real wine, both sherry and port.

When the dessert had been eaten, the father picked up a tall-stemmed glass full of ruby-red fluid, struck a fork against one of the caraffes to obtain silence, hemmed a little, and spoke:

"I want you to drink with Keith who today has ceased to be a child."

Keith stood by the side of the table. Some one pressed a glass into his hand. The guests clustered thickly around him.

"First of all, boy," the father went on, looking straight at Keith, "I and your mother and our friends here wish you welcome among us as one ready to be responsible for his own life. Then I want you to consider carefully this responsibility which is yours from today. Hitherto your mother and I have guided your steps because you did not know how to do it yourself. Now you must learn to do so, and if you fail, the burden of it will fall on yourself, though you must never forget that whatever goes wrong with you will bring the same amount of suffering to your mother and me as to yourself—if not more. So far we have tried to keep you from drinking and smoking, for instance. Hereafter you must be your own judge in such matters. We shall not interfere, although we shall never cease to watch over you. There are many other things that might be said on this occasion—much more important things—but they were said in church, and I trust you have stored them well in your memory. Finally I . . . we . . . wish you a happy and successful and above all honest and god-fearing life. We . . . your mother and I . . . have done our best to be honest and to teach you honesty. We have had a good deal of happiness, too . . . and this happiness you may increase for us by turning out the kind of man we hope you to become. As for success . . . well, I hope you will go farther than we have gone. *Skål,* Keith!"

His glass touched the rim of Keith's with a tiny crystalline ring. Then he turned to the guests again:

"Now we must give a threefold Swedish cheer for Keith. Now all together: Hip . . . hurrah! Hip-hip . . . hurrah-hurrah! Hip-hip-hip . . . hurrah-hurrah-hurrah!"

Keith's eyes were moist. He could feel his own heart beat, but not unpleasantly. Yes, he was happy. And his father . . . it really did seem as if a gate had opened in front of him that day.

XVI

WHEN he was through with his supper a few evenings later, Keith decided to run over to the Gullstrands. He had been told that Fru Gullstrand wanted him to tutor the rather indolent Per in mathematics and German. The proposition seemed both flattering and profitable. It meant a little money for his own pocket, and it meant also something to do at night. The tin soldiers had passed into oblivion, he did not exactly know how or when, and he could not read all the time. Per and his sister Elin might prove nice playmates when the night's lesson was finished. In addition it would give him a good excuse for going out more, although such an excuse was hardly needed any longer. . . .

Impulsively he grabbed his cap and whispered to his mother in order not to disturb his father, who was busy with a book: "I'll be back soon."

"Why, Keith!" she exclaimed. "You haven't said

where you are going . . . and you haven't asked for permission to go either."

Keith looked as if struck by lightning. A single word buzzed in his head: "Humbug . . . humbug . . . humbug!"

Then he explained. It was the easiest way. And he was accustomed to do so.

"All right," said his mother, "but you had better be back before half past nine."

"It's half past eight now," Keith expostulated. "And I thought. . . ."

"Whatever you thought," his father broke in, "there is no reason for making your mother unhappy, and you know how worried she is when you stay out late."

Keith left without saying another word. He was a child again.

On his way to the Gullstrands he tried to sum up what had happened to him a few days before . . . or rather what that happening meant to his everyday existence.

He could drink if he chose . . . well, he had no particular desire for it, and he had always been permitted to taste what was served in his parents' house—anything but *brännvin,* which was too strong for him. He could smoke . . . but most emphatically he refused to do so. He had tried once, and the results did not appeal to him. He could play cards . . . as he had done since he was twelve, when his father taught him the Swedish form of whist, *préférence* or *piffe*, in order to have a fourth player handy for emergencies.

But as for the rest. . . .

If a gate had been opened by his confirmation, he

had still to discover it, and his failure to discover it seemed to cast a reflection on the whole event.

XVII

BUT it did make a difference, although he could not notice it at home. . . .

Where he found it out was in and around the office. Kurt Engstrand, for example, was still cocksure and superior, but his attitude toward Keith had undergone a change beyond all doubt. He didn't tease quite so much or so crudely. He talked a little more *with* Keith, and a little less *at* him. Above all, he allowed himself open references to subjects which until then had been significantly avoided, or abruptly dropped at the appearance of the boy.

One day, as Keith entered the building, he heard roars of laughter from the store room back of Aunt Gertrude's shop. Although such sounds of merriment from that quarter were not uncommon, he decided to investigate.

Jonsson, the stock clerk, sat morosely humorous at his little desk in one corner, near the window. Engstrand perched on top of a pile of coffee sacks with knees drawn up to his chin. Heckel, another man from upstairs, was in the middle of the floor, bent almost double with laughter.

"You'll kill me one of these days with your damned stories, Engstrand," he gasped as Keith stepped into the room.

"Hush," cautioned Jonsson, who had the reputation

of surpassing all the rest in toughness of language and wealth of questionable experience.

"Hush nothing!" Engstrand rejoined dryly. "Wellander is no baby any longer, and now we must make a man of him."

Oh, it's Wellander once more, said Keith to himself —and the pleasure of it caused him to hoist the usual signal of stirred emotion.

"Not a baby perhaps, but always something of a lady," Jonsson put in gleefully. "All he needs for a blush is to hear that a good story has been told. . . ."

"We'll season him," Engstrand persisted. Then to Keith: "We're a tough gang, and I'll bet you never heard a story in your life like the ones we tell."

"Oh yes," protested Keith, ambitious to be thought on a level with his elders, and yet checked by a vague sense of reluctance. "If you mean stories that. . . ."

"Yes, that's the kind," grinned Engstrand when Keith failed to go on. "Where did your precious innocence become impaired to that extent?"

"In school," explained Keith, trying vainly to imitate the nonchalant tone of the others.

Another outburst of irreverent gaiety greeted his statement.

"Easy now," Engstrand came to Keith's rescue once more. "I still recall some good ones from those days."

"Give us a sample," urged Heckel.

"No," said Engstrand, getting down from the coffee sacks. "It's mail time."

Then, as he was about to leave the room, he turned to Heckel: "Will you be up for a game tonight?"

"With pleasure," replied Heckel. "On one condition. . . ."

"Stakes?" inquired Engstrand.

"No liquor," rejoined the other. "If you insist on making me drink, I won't come."

Keith looked surprised. He had heard that young Heckel was anything but moderate in his devotion to strong drinks.

Engstrand let out a long whistle and his eyes glistened with mischievous light.

Heckel looked slightly uncomfortable. "You're so damned quick in your conclusions," he muttered. "I have had enough for a while . . . that's all."

"We know you have," Engstrand assented graciously, "but that fact never made you stop before. What is it now?"

Heckel squirmed a moment before he uttered a word that made Keith stare at those three men with wide-open, unbelieving eyes.

"I thought so," Engstrand remarked with grim significance. "Well, suit yourself."

Then he left, and Keith followed him, his desire for information getting the better of his shyness.

"Herr Engstrand," he called, and the other man turned around. "I thought. . . ."

"Yes," Engstrand encouraged him, "and I'll give a handful of our best raisins for that thought of yours . . . if I can have it unexpurgated."

"I thought," Keith resumed after a hesitant pause, "that people were too ashamed of that kind of thing to talk of it."

"They don't cry it from the house-tops," Engstrand admitted. "But the damned thing is far too common to bother one's modesty very much. I don't know a single one of my acquaintances who has escaped it.

Nor will you, if I read you right . . . though heaven knows I wish you could."

Keith stood looking after him until his short-set, broad-shouldered figure disappeared in the deeper dusk of the stairway. At last he remembered that he should have been back in the office long ago. He wished he didn't have to go there.

Once more he wanted time and solitude for some hard thinking.

XVIII

HIS father had been looking downcast and worried for several days. Keith examined himself in fear of being the cause. His ease of mind seemed to be gone once more. But one night he learned the real reason and was much relieved. His paternal grandmother, old Fru Sara Wellander, was very sick and could probably not live much longer.

She had never played any great part in Keith's life, and when the news of her death came a couple of days later, he found it hard to change his customary appearance and behaviour in the manner evidently expected.

It was the first death in his immediate family and as such quite an event in his life. The passing of poor Herr Stangenberg while a tenant of the Wellanders could not be put in the same category, and Keith was so much younger at the time besides. He had a feeling that a special state of mind must be demanded of him on such an occasion, while, on the contrary, his mind clung obstinately to the ordinary affairs of life.

And if he felt anything at all not relating to those affairs, it was a strong disinclination to attend the impending funeral.

At the same time he watched with curiosity the impression made by his grandmother's death on the people around him. His father was deeply moved, but hid it behind an extra thick veil of stern taciturnity. His mother was touched, too, but more by her husband's sorrow than by any sense of real loss. There had never been much love wasted between her and her business-like, plain-spoken mother-in-law. But the one who seemed to take the news most to heart was, strange to say, Granny, whose relation to Keith's other grandmother had always smacked of armed truce.

"Why could it not be me instead," she muttered where she sat on the kitchen sofa, her hands as always busy with some humble household task. "Why should an old good-for-nothing hag like myself be left behind when better people have to go? She was seventy-eight, of course, and I am only seventy-two, but all the same. . . . Why? No one cares for me . . . not even death. And yet . . . he'll come sooner or later, as he comes to all. No one can stay for ever, and no one can foretell when he will call. . . . One by one they go. . . . I wonder who will be the next. . . ."

Thus she went on endlessly, one moment complaining because of her own long wait, and the next bewailing the inevitable fate of man. At last she summed it all up in one of her beloved old saws: "Well, old boots take a lot of polishing. . . . I suppose I am not ready yet, and heaven knows whether I'll ever get shine enough to be worth taking away."

As she spoke, tears rolled slowly down her furrowed old cheeks and she rocked her heavy body sidewise.

Keith watched and wondered. He probed his own heart mercilessly in search of a little bit of real sorrow, but nothing of the kind was to be found.

"Grandmother is dead," he said to himself. "She was papa's mother. She will be buried. I shall never see her again. And some day I shall die and be buried, too."

It did not help. There was not the slightest stir of emotion to be noticed within him. Not even the thought of the grave could stir him. Either because the disappearance of his grandmother meant nothing to his own real life, or for some other reason not apparent to his consciousness, his mind simply refused to deal with the subject of death.

Keith feared that he was not like other people.

XIX

THE funeral took place from the humble home which Uncle William had made for himself in one of the poorer quarters of the North End after his release from prison. He was the oldest son and the one that always ought to have taken care of his mother, but she had persistently refused to come and live with him while he still enjoyed some measure of prosperity. It was only misfortune and dishonour and poverty that brought her. Perhaps the disappearance of his wife had also something to do with it. Aunt Josephine was not dead, Keith knew, but she was gone, and no

one ever mentioned her. It filled Keith with a slight sense of regret. The wilted but still lovely-looking Aunt Josephine, with her extraordinary dresses, her futile craving for pleasure, and her perennial migraine, suggested to his mind things that he longed for without knowing exactly what they were.

Other members of the family were missing. Uncle Henrik had not come—or had not been asked. But Aunt Brita was there with her invalid husband, Uncle Marcus—a limping giant with a black beard a foot long—and Keith's cousin Carl, who was a couple of years younger than himself. Old friends and more distant relatives completed the little gathering. To Keith they looked like shadows—creatures who had shed their solid humanity but were still going about their everyday affairs under a pretence of being real.

Most of his attention, however, was given to his Uncle Wilhelm, to whom everybody tried to be particularly kind and who moved around the room as if asleep. It was that very kindness, with its air of being constantly on guard, that troubled Keith most, and that seemed also to trouble the object of it. It was like the hushed tenderness bestowed on one incurably diseased. Keith observed that he had very white, well-shaped hands like Keith's father. His eyes, once so bright and jolly, were now sunken and lustreless, and their glance slid off sideways whenever their owner found himself face to face with another person. Now and then he spoke a few words, and his voice, soft and apologetic, carried to the boy's heart a sadness so poignant that he wanted to cry, and some of those present thought he must have loved his dead grandmother very much indeed.

The whole scene—the apparition representing Uncle Wilhelm, the bare rooms, the low ceiling, the squalid street outside, the general effect to appear unconcerned —depressed and distressed Keith beyond endurance. A cruel fancy harassed his mind. He thought that the coffin was empty and that the corpse belonging to it was his uncle.

The simple ceremony seemed to consume hours. The journey to the cemetery, in carriages moving at a snail's pace, was endless. When, at last, he was travelling homeward more rapidly with his parents, he had to struggle hard not to break into hysteric laughter.

"I am glad there isn't a funeral every day," he burst out when they were nearly home.

"Have you no heart, Keith," asked his mother in a pained and startled voice.

"He never had," said his father darkly.

That night, as he was trying to seek forgetfulness in a book while his mind insisted on returning to the day's experiences, his mind began to ring with an expression of his mother's, overheard years ago:

"The Wellanders are going."

He recalled also Aunt Brita saying on the same occasion: "Keith will have to start it all over again from the beginning."

These words had struck deep roots in his consciousness. Time and again he had pondered their various implications. Sometimes they filled him with pride and ambition, and sometimes with a sort of despair. Now they seemed to mock him.

XX

THE effects of that funeral lingered for days, acting as a poisonous leaven that brought sundry dormant troubles into open fermentation. Other factors helped the process along.

Herr Tverholm returned, more debonair and self-satisfied and domineering than ever. The coffee-and-pastry orgies were resumed, with Andersson as a ribaldly rejoicing chorus, and the deficit in the petty cash account increased more rapidly again. To one familiar with the handling of money, the missing sum would have appeared pitifully insignificant, but it was not the sum that mattered to Keith. Like many other things on which the world places great store, money meant nothing to him in itself. His sense of proprietorship, so keen in regard to his small personal belongings, did not cover it. His entire feeling concerning that deficit was based on what his father had spoken to him about money and debts and dishonesty of any kind. Back of that feeling was fear of his father, and little else. Keith detested himself more and more for his unwilling participation in those impromptu parties, but nevertheless he enjoyed both the goodies from Krissman's and Herr Tverholm's increasingly suggestive stories. After the funeral of his grandmother, however, a vision of Uncle Wilhelm, with his sad eyes and sadder voice, threatened to become a regular fourth at their feasts, though seen only by Keith.

When alone in the office, as often happened even when Herr Tverholm was not "on the road," Keith

took more and more time from his work to read books he did not dare to take home. This kind of reading was an outgrowth of the gatherings in the store-room back of Aunt Gertrude's shop, which he attended whenever the opportunity offered itself. The talk down there roamed all over creation, and Keith's alert mind profitted in many ways by it, but sooner or later it turned with fatal regularity to the topic that fascinated Keith above all others, and when so happened, the terms of discussion became exceedingly frank to say the least. Nothing was said on purpose to shock the youngest member of the little group, but nothing was withheld to spare him. Books were often mentioned in the course of those talks, and it puzzled Keith that authors and titles alike were quite foreign to him. One day Engstrand was talking enthusiastically about a book named "The Memoirs of the Chevalier de Faublas," which he had just finished.

"I should like to read it," said Keith, moved by a sudden impulse. "Would you lend it to me?"

There was a pause. Jonsson groaned. Heckel tittered. Engstrand looked almost abashed for a moment. Then he glanced at Keith with a quizzical smile.

"The beginning of the end," he remarked enigmatically. "It's only a question of time anyhow. So why not? But I shouldn't read it aloud to my mother, if I were you, Wellander."

"I never do," Keith rejoined seriously and was surprised to hear the others break into loud guffaws.

He read the book in a fever. The world it opened to him was so startlingly novel. It was almost like learning to read over again. Much of what he read

puzzled him, and more of it passed him by without making any impression on him whatsoever. But two things he understood clearly: that what he read was forbidden fruit, and that somehow it administered to certain stirrings within himself that were not quite new, but that never before had pressed so hard on his baffled consciousness.

Other books of the same kind followed that first one. Engstrand furnished some of them, but always with a certain good-humoured reluctance. Then Andersson proved himself astonishingly an inexhaustible purveyor of what Keith had come to treasure above all other literature. The French Faublas was followed in Keith's left-hand drawer by the Italian Casanova, the English Moll Flanders and a cosmopolitan host of other figures, all of whom carried on their foreheads the phallic mark of those who live in the flesh alone.

Like Tannhäuser, Keith had passed the Hörselberg, had found the great gates ajar, and had caught a glimpse of the goddess at her toilet. That the image might be a mirage projected by thwarted and overwrought senses, he had no means of knowing. His blood was inflamed. He could think of nothing else. Nothing else mattered.

It was a time when happiness and unhappiness mingled in such confusion that one might easily be mistaken for the other. He moved as in a dream. He neglected his duties at the office. He gave incoherent answers when his parents spoke to him. His mother was evidently watching him with much concern. One Sunday afternoon, when unbearable restlessness had seized him because he had nothing at home which he

really cared to read, she called him over to her arm chair, made him sit down on the little stool at her feet and drew his head close to herself.

"I want you to promise me something, Keith," she said with that peculiar intensity which always spurred his own emotions, no matter how much he tried to harden himself.

"What is it," he asked evasively.

She looked at him searchingly before she went on.

"I can't be with you and protect you always," she said. "What must happen will happen, I suppose, and all I can do is to send my prayers after you. So I shall ask you for no promises you cannot keep. But what I ask now *is* possible, and if you give me your promise, I shall feel a tiny bit more secure. All I ask of you is that you never kiss any woman that . . . well . . . any woman of the kind you'll meet sooner or later. Will you promise me that, Keith?"

"All right, mamma," said Keith, at once relieved and disturbed.

Later he asked himself what in the world she could mean, and no plausible answer came. But her words stuck.

XXI

NEXT day Keith met Engstrand on the stairs and stopped him.

"Tell me," he began abruptly, "is it dangerous . . . or anything like that . . . to kiss a woman?"

"Very," replied the astounded Engstrand, his eyes dancing with suppressed delight. "In many ways."

"Why," inquired Keith eagerly.

"Because it generally leads to other things. And now, my infantile Don Juan, it is my turn to ask a question. Who is she?"

"She," Keith echoed. "There is no she. Why should there be?"

"Because otherwise there can be no kissing, idiot."

"Well," announced Keith, still intent on his own thoughts, "that's what I want to avoid."

Engstrand suddenly collapsed onto the stairs in sitting position, his head buried in his hands, his broad back shaking spasmodically. And Keith started on the run for the next landing, feeling that life would be much easier if people spoke more plainly and laughed a little less.

XXII

RESTLESSNESS had bcome the keynote of his entire existence. It was worse because he did not know what he wanted. The flaring images reflected in his mind by the books he read seemed to have no connection with reality. He revelled in pursuing the erotic exploits of a Faublas or a Casanova, but to imagine himself as aping their example never occurred to him. Day after day he worshipped Queen Venus secretly in the Hörselberg, but the few women he met had no more attraction for him than so many wooden dolls. He led a dual existence, indeed, and there were moments when he won-

dered whether his tortured mind could stand the strain much longer.

His nights were hardly less restless than his days, but they brought him the sole relief, the single source of undiluted happiness, known to him during that period.

He dreamt a great deal, and very vividly. The settings and circumstances of his dreams varied infinitely, but one concluding feature recurred unfailingly.

He found himself suddenly able to fly, or rather to walk through the air, and he alone in all the world had that power. Mostly he was in a crowd, and out of it he rose straight up, propelled and supported only by his own volition. Sometimes he was threatened and escaped by flight. More often the crowd was friendly and gaped at him with envious admiration. Sometimes he was in the open, among buildings, and leapt lightly from the ground to the edge of a roof, much as a bird swings itself to its lofty perch, but without effort and without the movement of a muscle. Commonly, however, he was in a room or a large hall well packed with people, and while at times he might indulge in a promenade along the ceiling, his favourite amusement was to glide slowly just above the heads of those watching him, almost within reach of their hands, and yet safe from capture or pursuit.

The exultation accompanying those dreams was ecstatic beyond anything his waking life ever brought him, and when the morning came and his mother's voice called him from the livingroom, he felt as one exiled from a paradise more alluring than any pictured by the books.

XXIII

THE question of companionship had become acute again as it used to be while he was still at school. He was far too much thrown back on his own resources. Worse still, he had no one to whom he could "let off steam."

The limitations of Aunt Gertrude were too self-evident to permit her consideration for such a purpose. Per Gullstrand was a child. Engstrand was available only in brief snatches and during the daytime. And the difference in age between them was still too marked for genuine intimacy. In his sore distress, Keith's thoughts turned to his earliest playmate, Johan Gustafsson.

Johan was still living in the house at the corner of the Quay. His mother remained as naïvely pious and his father as unassumingly plodding as ever. But Johan himself had experienced quite a rise in life. He was no longer drudging in a store. The same influence that once raised the elder Gustafsson from a wood carrier to a *vaktmästare* had now placed Johan in a steamship office, where he claimed to hold a position identical to that of Keith's. Cross-examination convinced Keith that Johan was nothing but an office boy, but as a matter of instinctive precaution, he kept this conclusion to himself.

The boys met from time to time, but casually and without much enthusiasm. Johan was as clumsy and dull as ever, but always with an undercurrent of

canniness that was foreign to Keith. The strangest thing about Johan, however, was that, with no more salary than Keith, he always had money at his disposal. Now and then he hinted also that his cash was used in ways too advanced for stay-at-home babies like Keith. The truth of their relationship was that each one of them despised and envied the other a little.

They had nothing in common. Keith, in particular, could get nothing from Johan of what he most wanted, and he knew it. The likelihood is that they would have continued to watch each other from a growing distance but for the appearance of a third boy, Zachris Pehrson, who brought them into fateful intimacy for a while by using all the mischief of which he was capable to break up a friendship that did not exist.

The slick-haired, hook-nosed and beady-eyed Zachris came from a little island province in the south. Figuratively speaking, he still smelled of the sheep spillings that to him formed the most characteristic feature of his daily environment. Others might have been dragged out of their puny selves by the streak of blue ocean that glistened in the distance, but Zachris never put the tip of his nose outside the shell of narrowly utilitarian self-concern that encased him as does a sheep's hide the carcass.

He had come to Stockholm to make a career, and a lucky chance had landed him in a wholesale office of considerable standing with fine quarters facing the Quay. Much more than Keith, he felt that his feet were set on the right ladder, and his ignorance prevented him from ever questioning his own climbing power.

In Keith's life he was the fleetest of accidents, but swift as was his passing, he left lasting marks behind. Keith's mother heard that he was looking for a room and thought it a good chance to make a little extra money while at the same time providing Keith with the company for which he was pining. The big closet back of the parlour, which had the size of a small room, was equipped with a washstand and turned into a dressing-room. The boys slept and lived in the parlour. Zachris, to whom Keith at first seemed quite superior, was amenity itself. For a brief while the arrangement looked ideal.

Unfortunately Zachris was an inveterate intriguer. He span funny little webs of mischief not only for the sake of furthering his own interests, but for the sheer joy of testing his own powers in that direction. As soon as he had got all he could expect out of Keith, he looked elsewhere and discovered Johan, whom he began to cultivate with fawning eagerness. Keith was foolish and lonely enough to be hurt in the same degree as Johan was flattered. Then, when Johan in his turn had been exhausted, the indefatigable Zachris tried to change face once more in order to use Keith against his more recent friend. It was all so very crude and childish, but it made Johan furious enough to cause the first decided effort on his part to make friends with Keith.

The exit of Zachris from the Wellander household was typical of the whole incident. The boys were having a Saturday evening wash, and Keith, who had finished his feet first and used his only towel to wipe them, yelled to his mother for another towel to use on his face. The father heard him and came into the room.

"Can't you use the same towel for both ends of your body," he demanded a little irascibly.

"It isn't nice," Keith explained feebly.

"Soon you'll be too refined for our humble company, I fear," the father retorted. "But while you are here, one towel will have to do."

Had Zachris been able to keep quiet, that would have been the end of it, but the twin impulse of currying favour with the powers that be and of getting in a safe kick at the under dog was too strong for him.

"It's enough for me, Uncle Carl," he put in officiously. "I don't care what part I have wiped before I use the towel on my face."

"There you hear, Keith," said the father, withdrawing hastily as with a sense of having won a Pyrrhic victory.

Keith said nothing at the time. But he thought the more. The interference of Zachris he regarded as an unforgivable betrayal. But what hurt him more was his father's failure to appreciate a refinement which seemed so natural to Keith that he couldn't argue on behalf of it.

When Zachris spoke to him as if nothing had happened, Keith did not answer. Nor did he ever speak another word to his room mate. Soon the situation became unbearable even to one so lacking in sensitiveness as Zachris, and within two weeks he moved to another place, leaving Keith in undisputed control of the parlour, to which a dressing-room of a kind had now been added.

By that time fate had got the chance it was looking for, and Keith had more serious things to consider than the proper number of towels for each washing.

XXIV

ZACHRIS was still living with the Wellanders when Johan looked up Keith, intercepting him one night in the lane on his return from the office. Their meeting was evidently meant to appear accidental, but Keith guessed that Johan had been waiting for him with a definite purpose in his mind.

"Want a Ducky-Durry," he asked, holding out one of the new Duke of Durham cigarettes that were just being introduced to the hopeful youth of Sweden. "It's better than anything I know."

"I don't see how you can do it," said Keith a little squeamishly, but not without a touch of envy in his voice.

"Can't live without 'em," explained Johan, blowing some smoke through his nostrils. Then he came straight to the point uppermost in his mind: "That Zachris is a damned skunk. He says you are a baby and should be dressed in skirts with silk ribbons on 'em."

"He says you are as stupid as a goose and as coarse as a ram that has run loose all winter," Keith retaliated. "And he sides against me when my father is down on me already. I am through with him."

"So am I," Johan chimed in with unaccustomed show of feeling. "He made my mumsey think he was religious, so I had to go to church twice last Sunday. But I'll show him."

So little had Keith associated with boys of his own age that the situation proved fascinatingly novel to him. A feud was on, such as crop out daily among any little group of half-grown males—or females, for that matter—and he had a sworn ally who shared his own grievance against the common enemy. From that moment the road was clear for a new intimacy between himself and Johan. The latter's less desirable qualities were temporarily forgotten.

It was plain, too, that Johan was anxious to win Keith's favour, and for this purpose he offered him the best he had. As a smaller boy might have offered toys or goodies, so Johan offered his greater knowledge and experience of life. Perhaps he still recalled previous talks of theirs, years ago, when Keith was the eager questioner and he the reluctant answerer. Soon Keith learned things that rendered him almost speechless, but that made Johan appear in a far more interesting light.

Johan had been to women . . . more than once . . . and he knew all about it.

"Is it. . . . " Keith had a thousand questions to ask and could not formulate a single one. "Tell me. . . . "

"Can't be done," Johan declared. "You must find out for yourself."

"How can I," asked Keith hopelessly.

"Nothing easier," was Johan's prompt and oracular answer. "There's one right around the corner here."

"On East Long Street, you mean?"

"Right around the corner," Johan reiterated. "I know her, and I'll take you up there."

"But I have no money," Keith recalled, his mind fluttering wildly between fear and longing.

"I'll loan you a *krona,*" Johan offered. "It's all you need."

This was the final stroke. It meant the removal of an obstacle that to Keith seemed more serious than any moral objection. In fact, he was totally unaware of any moral scruples, having not the faintest idea of what the matter involved. But he was scared for some unknown reason, and he knew instinctively that his father and mother would disapprove. At the same time he was stirred and impelled by inner forces far more mysterious and powerful than those holding him back. The uneven conflict was violent enough to involve his whole being. While his head seemed on fire, the rest of his body chilled to the marrow.

"When," he stammered, more to gain time than with any intention to avail himself of Johan's generous offer. Had Johan suggested a future date, the probability is that nothing would have happened at all—not for a good long while at least. But the mind of Johan was made up.

"Tonight," he replied urgently. "At once. She's in, I think. I have the money, and you can stay out a little longer. Come on."

He led the way. Keith followed. His will was paralysed, and he moved as one being carried blindfolded to his death.

XXV

THEY entered a dark and dingy hallway. At the head of a flight of damp stone steps flickered a light of some kind. Johan continued to lead the way as one familiar with the road as well as with the goal at its end.

Keith lagged a few steps behind, trying frantically to raise will or courage enough to run away. But he was too numbed for any action on his own initiative.

His lips were so dry and stiff that he could not have shaped a word if his life had hung on its utterance. His tongue cleaved to the roof of his mouth. Chills passed quiveringly up and down his spine. His legs bent under him so that he had to steady himself by clinging to the banister. A mist full of tiny stars floated between him and the dank walls of the stairway.

He, the secret worshipper of Queen Venus, the passionate reader of Faublas and Casanova, was frightened into practical unconsciousness by his first adventuring into the gloomy depths of the Hörselberg, although the fires of the goddess of love glittered alluringly ahead of him. And it was the paralysis of fright more than anything else that kept him climbing those damp stairs in the wake of Johan, toward that flickering light which finally revealed not a jewelled throne, but a dirty door without any card or nameplate on it.

Johan knocked discreetly. A woman's voice within cried out a question.

"It's me," Johan replied. "Johan . . . you know!"

The door opened lazily, disclosing a rather fattish, redhaired, sloppily dressed woman, with a moonlike, not unkindly face.

"Oh, you have a friend with you," she said, looking indifferently from one to the other. "All right, come in . . . if you mean business."

From that moment Keith's last remnant of clear consciousness was gone, and he did not become aware of himself and his surroundings again until he and Johan were on the street once more.

"Well," Johan inquired suggestively.

"Thanks," said Keith automatically. "I think I'll go home now."

He realized in a flash that it was very late, and that he would have to tell a lie at home about being delayed at the office. He had never done so before, and for a while this new problem mercifully excluded other thoughts from his mind.

Later, when he had parted from Johan and was slowly ascending his own stairs, it occurred to him as a reassuring feature of his experience that his lips had never touched the woman's.

XXVI

DURING the rest of the evening he moved in a stupor, out of which gradually emerged little fragments of recollection.

The revulsion he experienced was extreme. It shook him and sickened him far worse than had the

proposition sprung upon him so unexpectedly by Johan a few hours earlier.

Perhaps he suffered more from his disappointment than from any other aspect of what had just happened to him.

Pleasure . . . nonsense! Intoxication . . . worse than nonsense!

If he had felt anything at all, it was pain . . . pain, humiliation and disgust.

There was not one redeeming circumstance on which he could let his mind dwell to gather some relief from the flood of shame and depression that swept through his cowering soul.

That night, however, he slept without dreams.

When he went to the office next morning, there was a suggestion of swagger in his walk. He felt that he was a man at last, and now he could meet the group in the store-room on almost equal terms.

And yet, he kept saying to himself, what did it amount to, anyhow?

That it had opened no gates to a new and richer life, he felt sure.

Of regrets, on the other hand, he had none, although a vague sense of uneasiness and disapproval of himself persisted.

XXVII

A FEW days later Keith was in trouble. At first he refused to believe it. Then further refusal became impossible. His physical discomfort was serious. His state of mind was worse.

The final edge of the situation was furnished by his ignorance and the free scope thus given to his imagination.

Thoughts of suicide actually flitted through his mind, but all inclinations in that direction were fundamentally foreign to him. In spite of his brooding and dreaming, and in spite of his acceptance of books as substitutes for real life, there ran through his mental make-up a tough and practical strain, inherited perhaps from the sober, solid ancestry of that little old lady whose funeral he had recently attended with so much displeasure. He was in trouble . . . bad trouble . . . but he would get out of it . . . somehow . . . and . . . it was a man's trouble!

No sense of sin had yet taken hold of him. Self-pity took precedence of all other feelings. Next came fear of his father. It took the place of purely moral qualms and mingled curiously with a sense of grievance against his mother on account of her futile warnings . . . just as if it mattered whether you kissed or not!

XXVIII

WHEN his need was greatest a name occurred to him, coming out of nowhere as if in answer to a request . . . the name of a physician which he had heard more than once from the lips of Heckel and Jonsson.

After a few cautious inquiries, Keith obtained leave of absence from the office for a few hours and pre-

pared to face the worst ordeal of his life up to that moment.

Dr. Coriander proved kindness itself, but on one point he was obdurate, and that was the point which brought more terror to Keith's soul than any other feature of the situation . . . his father must be told.

"Listen, my boy," the doctor said when Keith was about to leave, "you know Tegnér, of course?"

"A little," Keith replied puzzled.

"He wrote a few lines once that every youngster like you should read and cherish: 'The boy wants to forestall his youth, and the youth his manhood, and thus the man grows old prematurely.' Will you try to recall those lines the next time temptation takes you by the throat, or friends more unwise than yourself try to lead you astray?"

"Yes, Herr Doctor," Keith stammered, and never had he given a promise with more intense determination of keeping it.

XXIX

THE relation between Keith and his father had been more than usually strained by that little incident of the towel. Few words had passed between them since then, and Keith had kept out of the way as much as possible. Now the acute character of their perennial conflict seemed most unfortunate.

As always on similar occasions, Keith shut his eyes

and plunged. The opportunity came that same evening, when he caught his father alone in the living-room.

"I went to see the doctor . . . " Keith began.

"Our doctor?"

"N-no . . . Dr. Coriander . . . and he told me to tell you . . ."

"Dr. Coriander . . . hm!"

Keith nodded with a feeling that, in the next moment, the world, as far as he was concerned, might cease to exist. For a long, long while his father sat absolutely still without saying a word or showing by a mien what he was thinking. Then he spoke . . . very quietly and without a trace of reproach in his voice:

"Be sure to do what he told you . . . and have him send the bill to me."

That was all. Keith stared incredulously at the stern, reserved man in front of him, whose actions he could never foretell. Then, as he was turning to leave, his father added:

"Don't say a word to your mother . . . I'll speak to her."

The immediate impulse of Keith was to shout with joyful relief. A miracle had happened, it seemed. He had been lost and was saved. Then his throat grew tight. The repressed agony of anticipation wracked him now when it was all over. He felt nauseated. By slow degrees he recovered, and the sense of relief prevailed in the end.

But what a fool he had been. he said to himself . . . in more senses than one!

XXX

A PECULIARLY unreal atmosphere brooded over the home during the next few weeks. Not a word was said to Keith again. But he could feel his mother's eyes following him with a queer expression in them whenever she thought that he did not notice her.

The attitude of both parents reminded Keith of something which his memory at first strove vainly to recall. Then a realization of the truth flashed upon him . . . his grandmother's funeral.

That was the way every one had been looking at and talking to his Uncle Wilhelm.

It gave Keith a creepy feeling of being unclean, loathsome. It was as unbearable as it was intangible. Hard words, blows even, would have been better.

And yet . . . he bowed before that silent kindness. He succumbed to it as he would have succumbed to no other treatment.

Long buried threads of the past came to light again and began to sprout into new life. Thoughts he had almost forgotten fermented anew in his brain.

Was he not unclean and loathsome? Was there another human being more worthless or depraved or ungrateful?

In the midst of this agony of self-accusation, he was nagged by a desire to let somebody else into his momentous secret . . . preferably Engstrand . . . but the right chance never occurred, and later he despised himself still more on account of that foolish impulse.

XXXI

IT never rains but it pours . . . whether the rain be good or bad, a refreshing spring shower, or a devastating fall deluge. On top of his formal dismissal by Dr. Coriander came another piece of good fortune.

He had been a year in the office, and the anniversary figured in his mind long before it arrived. Logically it should lead either to his discharge or his promotion. While the punishment for his rashness was still upon him, he felt sure of an unfavourable outcome. His wretchedly childish handwriting had not improved, and he was depressingly conscious of the manner in which he had neglected his work for some time. Why should Herr Brockhaus keep him and pay him a real salary when the city was full of eager young lads ready to take his place?

Nevertheless he made up his mind to speak to his employer as soon as an opportunity offered itself. Before he could do so, Herr Brockhaus broached the subject himself. With a friendliness that took the boy by surprise, the elder man praised his willingness and his knowledge of the stock. Chiefly on those accounts, and in spite of his poor handwriting, Keith would be kept and given a monthly salary of twenty-five *kronor.*

Coming right on top of his parents' unexpected sympathy and forbearance, it was too much for the boy, whose equilibrium had already been badly shaken. In spite of the exultation with which the good news

filled him, he was more upset by it than if another adversity had befallen him.

He ran home from the office as he had often run from school when he had something important to tell his mother—something that might please her and the father, and thus make his own life more pleasant. But in the middle of Iron Square he came to a sudden halt.

His mind was working backward to something of great significance that he had known once and since then forgotten. For a minute or so he stood in the middle of the square pondering gravely. Then he started homeward again, but very slowly and with head bent forward.

He was abruptly wakened out of his speculations by a rough slap on the back, and he heard Johan's voice drawl out:

"Have you lost anything?"

Keith swung about as if he had heard the hissing of a viper. One glance was all he gave Johan, but it was like the quick stab of a stiletto.

The sound of that voice at that precise moment had acted as a plug slipped into a contact hole, snapping the proper association into place in his mind. What he had been groping for stood so vividly before him that he wondered how he could ever have thought it forgotten.

"Sin!" he spat at Johan as if his former friend had been the very personification of all that was evil.

Then he turned and ran as if for his life.

"Wait till I catch you," he heard Johan yell angrily behind him.

He ran faster than ever—not because he was afraid

of Johan, but because he was trying to run away from a much more real horror.

The sights and sounds of that Sunday when he was confirmed whirled through his mind like a film reel run at top speed. At first sheer chaos reigned. Little by little that nebulous mass crystallized into a single painfully distinct impression. A man was speaking somewhere in a passionately pleading and subtly threatening tone. All the time he was repeating a single phrase. And as Keith ran along, he muttered repeatedly that one phrase:

"Conviction of sin! Conviction of sin! Conviction of sin!"

That night, after he had made sure that the door to his parents' room was closed, he pulled the bed clothing up to his nose, folded his hands under them, and said the Lord's Prayer.

XXXII

A PERIOD of comparative calm intervened before the new trend in Keith's development gathered headway.

Unexpectedly and astonishingly, his lapse had brought him peace at home. More consideration was shown for his tastes and wishes. It seemed almost as if his parents had decided to humour him lest resistance precipitate still worse misconduct. His increased salary helped, too. Small as it was, it had become sufficient to pay a stated monthly sum for his keep, while five *kronor* was left for himself to be expended without accounting. To Keith, who never be-

fore had had anything at all assured, this infinitesimal sum bore the aspect of real wealth. But when, in this connection, he suggested the propriety of letting him have a latchkey of his own, parental opposition stiffened noticeably, and for the moment he was not in a mood to fight that issue to a finish. It did not matter anyhow, as he had nowhere to go in the evening.

Herr Tverholm was away. Engstrand and his friends seemed less desirable, and for that reason less accessible. Andersson brought no more doubtful books when no longer encouraged to do so. Day after day the left-hand drawer remained free of its former surreptitious contents. Instead Keith devoted himself to his duties with unprecedented fervour. He even made systematic efforts to improve his handwriting, though with scant results. Long talks with Aunt Gertrude about nothing in particular furnished the only break in an existence that could not fail to become unendurably monotonous in the long run. Once she told him that Fru Walter with her two daughters had settled down in Stockholm for good, so that now he would be sure to meet them. This announcement made no particular impression on him, and soon he forgot it.

He told himself that he was happy and satisfied, but he was neither, and he knew it. Something had been wrenched loose within him, and it prevented his mind from settling down. More and more frequently his thoughts returned to his confirmation and to the period of instruction preceding it. He had a sense of having missed many important things, and he tried strenuously to recall some of Pastor Soop's exhorta-

tions. Nothing would come, however . . . nothing but that one ominous phrase: conviction of sin.

For the first time the name and idea of God began to figure seriously in his speculations. As far as he could make out, God was a superior person of some kind, hopelessly and mysteriously removed, who wanted you to do certain things and to refrain from others. To this conception his mind failed utterly to respond. That, in the main, it was accepted by his father and mother, by Pastor Soop and Aunt Gertrude, he knew, and it did not occur to him to question the correctness of their ideas. Those ideas simply did not mean anything to him as far as actual conduct was concerned, and so he fell back in the end on the character of his own actions apart from any supernatural regulation. The moment he did so, that phrase of Pastor Soop's would recur more insistently than ever: conviction of sin!

It had no specific meaning either. He was not clearly conscious of having done anything wrong. He had done something, of course, that he was not supposed to do—that his father and mother and other people regarded with deep disapproval. He tried to tell himself that it was a sin—that he had sinned grievously—but it carried no conviction to that part of himself which seemed to sit in ultimate judgment on everything and which would countenance no laws but its own.

Yet he was bitterly dissatisfied with himself, and out of this attitude of largely unreasoning disapproval sprang gradually a conviction, not of sin or wrongdoing, but of his own general unworthiness. That

sense of being unclean, loathsome, which had tormented him so sorely a while ago, returned, but now no longer associated with any special action or condition. Being so much vaguer and more elusive, it was so much harder to fight, and finally he reached a state of suffering and self-torture where it seemed as if he would perish completely unless he got some help and guidance from without.

XXXIII

KEITH was earnestly considering a visit to Pastor Soop when another search of his father's collection brought into his hands a book translated from the English. The author was an American named William M. Thayer. He had evidently patterned his book on Samuel Smiles' famous "Self-Help," at which Keith later in life cast a few scornful glances. Chapter after chapter was devoted to stories of success achieved by poor men and women against tremendous odds. All they had to assist them in conquering those odds sprang from their own indomitable wills and—from their equally indomitable faith in God and the Bible.

It was a well written book, appealing consistently to a boy in Keith's position, and he read it in a trance. It was so real, so tangible, in its promises. Of course, the Kingdom of Heaven loomed gloriously in the distance, but in the meantime those capable of concentrating their whole existence on a single idea were assured of a kingdom in this world as well. Their success might, or might not, imply wealth and rank

and position. It didn't matter. What did matter was the cry of an admiring world: "Well done, thou good and faithful servant!"

At the thought of it, Keith's breast heaved with hope and pride and longing. He laid a thousand plans that might lead him to such a miraculous consummation. He told himself a thousand fairy tales about having already achieved it. But none of them brought him a step beyond the spot where, in reality, he was floundering so miserably. They could not even help his awkward hands to produce a form of writing acceptable to Herr Brockhaus.

Gradually his attention became focused exclusively on the last few chapters of the book, which were devoted to the need of reading the Bible, and to the part it had played in the life of almost every man who had attained genuine greatness in modern times. It was a glowing, passionately sincere tribute to a volume from which countless numbers of aspiring minds had drawn inspiration and consolation.

The inference was as clear as it was simple. Keith must do as all the rest had done. He must read the Bible. But to read it in the right spirit, he must first pray to God for grace and light.

XXXIV

NIGHT after night Keith read a chapter in his mother's big Bible—the one with the pictures, which he had studied so eagerly as a small boy, and from which he had got his first instruction in the intricacies of reading.

It was the last thing he did at night. When he was through, he crawled into bed and prayed . . . not only the Lord's Prayer, which his mother had taught him before he could read, but improvised supplications of his own . . . burning appeals to the Great Power above that, in His kindness and wisdom, He might condescend to drop into the bosom of a half-grown boy in St. John's Lane that impelling spark which would first make of him a good man, and then a great one. The word success did not figure in those prayers, but it was undoubtedly present in the back of Keith's head.

He prayed as boys of his age and kind have prayed everywhere and at every time. He prayed unselfishly, as he thought . . . for willingness and ability to obey his parents and his employer; for strength and desire to do what was right rather than what pleased him; for courage to accept what his fate might bring, but also, and still more, for power to rise above that fate. He prayed in absolute momentary faith that his supplication would rise to a supernal throne, whence, in due time, the answer would come in some form recognizable not only by himself but by the world at large.

At first he prayed in bed, lying down. Then, after consulting Thayer, he decided that more was required. And with one eye on the door behind him, that might open any moment to admit his father or mother, he knelt in his night-shirt beside his bed and breathed forth still more fervent prayers on his bare knees.

He was in deadly earnest about it. And yet there was a part of himself that refused to join the rest, so to speak. As he sought for more and more burn-

ing words in which to clothe his humility, his surrender, and his trust, that part seemed to watch him from without and mock at his eloquence and his pretended humility.

The day came at last when Keith wondered whether he might be the object of supervision and interference on the part of more than one supernatural agency. But when he got that far, the end of this phase of his life was in sight.

XXXV

IT was his sense of logic that paved the way for the end.

From the first his reading of the nightly Bible chapter had been accompanied by a certain inner resistance that grew as he went on.

He began right at the beginning—with the first chapter of Genesis—and he went right on without skipping.

The story of the creation charmed him without exactly inspiring him. The moment he got beyond it, his troubles began. And yet he read with a heart-breaking desire to accept, and to reach through that acceptance to the state of exalted certainty promised him by the Thayer volume. Time and again he returned to this volume for the purpose of making sure that the divine inspiration ascribed to that other, greater book was complete and extended to its every part. Thus fortified, he returned to the adventures of Moses, Jacob, Abraham and the rest . . . always with increasing resistance from within.

He had reached as far as the birth of Isaac, when at last a realization of the true character of his difficulties burst upon him.

He was bored. . . .

What he read left him utterly indifferent. He didn't care about the incidents related by the book, and he couldn't make himself care. The story as a whole appeared trivial and meaningless. No amount of forced application would avail to extract any inspiration, or even information, from it.

Characteristically, he turned not against the book, but against himself, when he reached that far. He felt convinced that the fault lay with his own recalcitrant mind, and not with the minds that formed those ancient records in response to directions from some source of authority far above all human frailty. Of all men, it seemed, he was the one so low and mean and blind that he could not find solace at the fountain where for centuries so many seekers after truth and goodness had slaked their spiritual thirst.

Then he prayed, and read again, and prayed some more . . . always with the same result. Whatever might be involved, however tremendous the stake, his mind would not yield. And so there was nothing left but to give up the reading.

With that he gave up all hope. This point marked his lowest state of wretchedness. He felt an outcast —rejected by men and rejected by God as well. What the end would be, he dared not try to picture.

His mother was watching him again, apparently fearing a repetition of past misadventures. He felt sorry for her, but more sorry for himself.

XXXVI

WHEN it was all over, Keith could not recall whence had come the relief that brought him out of that intense crisis. Everything happened so quickly. It was a matter of a few hours only, with hopeless despair on one side of it, and triumphant self-confidence on the other.

What did it was another book . . . lent him by somebody . . . by Engstrand perhaps, who, it seemed, had also been watching Keith out of a corner of his ever roving eye.

It was an American book again . . . five lectures on the various books of the Old Testament by one Robert Ingersoll. Keith remembered accepting it without much enthusiasm. He did not think that where the Thayer volume had failed so pitifully, anything else could possibly be of more help. And he started reading it chiefly because any book was still a temptation to him, and because he happened to have no other one at hand just then.

When he had read a few pages, he literally rubbed his eyes and began all over again from the beginning, but now with breathless attention given to every word. It seemed quite unbelievable. Page after page, however, remained stamped with the same spirit of incisive skepticism. On and on he plunged, caring little for details, or for each argument offered. It was the general attitude of the author that caught him and filled him with a sort of intoxication.

Here was another man who dared to voice openly

all the doubts and objections and misgivings that had tormented his own mind so unspeakably. And this man was not afraid or ashamed . . . of anything or any one.

When Keith had finished the first lecture, he broke abruptly into loud laughter.

"What in the world is the matter, boy," cried his mother anxiously from the other room.

"Nothing," Keith shouted back loftily. "I am only reading a good book."

"Well," his father admonished, "you might be a little more quiet about it."

Keith didn't care. He had just recovered the most precious possession any human being can boast—his self-respect.

He read on, finishing the whole book in a single sitting, which was uncommon for him, as he was not a fast reader. After a while he hardly knew what he read, and this did not matter either. That first lecture had done the work, and the cumulative effect of the rest was superfluous.

Keith felt as if he had been lying in a coffin, with the lid nailed down over him, and the coffin carried slowly toward a dark and narrow grave, into which it would be lowered shortly. . . .

Now he discovered suddenly that it was nothing but a bad dream. He was awake again, splendidly awake, free, on his feet, with the sun shining around him, and the whole world smiling at him, and no grave or coffin in sight. . . .

The book was closely reasoned and seemed quite convincing. Not only logic, but much learning, seemed to have gone into the making of it. All this,

however, was of secondary importance to Keith. The general conclusions alone mattered, and these he accepted unquestioningly almost from the start, not because of any argument or fact offered in support of them, but because they proved identical with conclusions already formed by his own mind and suppressed out of ignorant fear . . . fear not of God, but of men; not of sin, but of being different; not of burning eternally in hell, but of becoming an outcast here and now.

He had been suffering like one already damned under a dreadful illusion of uniqueness, and it was this illusion, with all its fatal consequences to a mind still unformed, that had been shattered by what seemed now an almost providential intercession. A sort of reverence mingled with his wild joy. He had prayed for light, and he had got it.

He might still be as iniquitous in the eyes of many as he had imagined only a few hours before. This iniquity was shared and defiantly accepted by one other man. That was enough. One man in this case was as good as a host to Keith, and from the knowledge of that companionship in ruthless questioning of an authority by so many declared unquestionable, he received the courage he had been lacking to think his own thoughts regardless of other people's opinions about them.

To the book itself he never returned. It had filled its mission, and it no longer interested him. Nor did he think of gates opened in front of him, or of new horizons disclosed. His initial feeling was merely that of being rid of a nightmare.

XXXVII

THE effect was retroactive. The quickness of his recovery convinced him that the crisis had been artificial, having little to do with the issues and problems leading up to it. And he was inclined to take a different attitude toward these underlying causes as well. What he had tried to dignify into a mortal sin shrank into a quite venal mishap, from which he had been providentially rescued with more gain than loss. At the same time, however, the fires that sent him astray had burned themselves out, too, and all his new tendency toward exculpation could not make him look with approval on the muddy paths into which they had led him.

Finally, his discovery of the Ingersoll volume opened his eyes to the previously unsuspected existence of a whole vast literature of similar bearing. The next book that fell into his hands was Max Nordau's "Conventional Lies," and he read it with still greater attention. It went farther in a way, and it opened prospects that so far had been closed to him. The questions it raised were not only religious, but social, moral and political. It finished what the other book had begun . . . there was nothing in this world or beyond it, Keith felt, that could not and should not be questioned.

Thus a clean sweep was made of practically everything that Keith's mind until then had harboured of dogmas and creeds and systems and sanctions. Nothing appeared to take the place of what was swept out.

For a while he lived in a spirit of pure negation and revelled in it.

One night they had company at home. Contrary to custom, they talked after supper instead of playing cards, and the talk drifted toward religion. Some one had read a book by a well known Swedish writer, Viktor Rydberg, on "What the Bible Teaches Us about Christ," and its very mild criticism of established Lutheran dogmas was rather boldly supported. His father agreed that it was foolish to believe in a hell, and that the problem of the Trinity was a little too much for anybody. The atmosphere was distinctly liberal.

Keith listened for a while with a sort of bored indignation. Finally his consciousness of superior insight became too much for him.

"It's all rot," he exclaimed. "What's the use of bothering about it?"

A quick silence, almost frightened, fell on the little assemblage. Everybody stared at the boy. Keith's mother looked as if the earth had opened at her feet. But the father turned to him with a self-assured irony no less superior than Keith's own.

"What is it you call rot, my boy," he asked.

"Religion," cried Keith excitedly. "All of it. There is nothing behind it but a lot of fairy tales."

The silence of the others was becoming embarrassing.

"And what, if I may ask," the father went on in the same scornful tone, "do you believe . . . seeing that our religion is no longer good enough for you?"

"But you yourself just . . ." Keith started to protest.

"I have never questioned the main principles," the father retorted firmly, "and I never shall. But you . . . what *do* you believe . . . if anything at all?"

"I . . ." Keith gasped, quaking under the searching glances of many eyes. Then a flood of courage swept through him: "No . . . nothing at all . . . I'm an atheist . . . *of course!*"

The rest of the little circle seemed to have disappeared. He and his father remained alone. His father sat looking at him for a while with a queer expression that Keith failed to interpret. At last he said in a tone that was sad rather than stern:

"You have read a lot, my boy. You think you know a lot . . . everything, in fact. But there is one thing you have not yet learned, and I hope life will not be too harsh in giving you the lesson that is sure to come."

"What is it," Keith inquired, intimidated against his will.

"That," his father replied, quoting one of Granny's favourite proverbs, "a well guarded tongue befits old and young."

XXXVIII

THIS incident may have caused, or at least hastened, what happened shortly afterward. Keith could not escape a sense of connection. His parents were still going to church very seldom, although his mother in particular frequently remarked

that it was a shame and a sin not to go more regularly. Nothing was said to Keith about going.

One day, however, his father said to him with customary abruptness:

"Be ready to go to church with us next Sunday, Keith. Your mother and I have not been to communion for a long while, and we have decided to go this time. I have sent in your name with ours."

"Mine," Keith blurted out in surprised resentment. "I am not going."

"Of course, you are," rejoined his father sharply. "You have been confirmed now, and so it is proper and customary that you should attend when we do."

There was a long pause during which Keith thought hard and both parents watched him.

"I have been looking forward to it so long and so eagerly," his mother broke the silence at last. "It will be our first communion together . . . the three of us . . . and I know it must mean as much to you as it does to us. . . ."

Keith shook his head. His mind was made up.

"I cannot go with you," he said a little brusquely.

"What kind of nonsense is that," his father demanded grimly. "What is there to prevent you from going? Isn't our company good enough, perhaps?"

"I cannot go," Keith repeated more quietly, "because I don't believe in it, and because I think that to act as if I did would be much worse than not going at all."

"Oh, Keith, what have you done," his mother moaned.

"It means that your mother and I can't go either," his father interposed.

"That's ridiculous," Keith bristled, forgetting himself beyond all precedent in his eagerness to assert his newly found independence of mind. "Why shouldn't you?"

"Because we would be ashamed," his father explained not unkindly. "Everybody knows that we have a son who has been confirmed, and if we appear at communion without you, there will be a lot of nasty talk."

"For our sake," his mother pleaded. "It means so much to us . . . and we have been so neglectful in the past . . . we must make up for it . . . and you don't want to prevent us from doing so?"

"There is no reason why you shouldn't go without me," Keith cried mercilessly, egged on by a sort of fierce exultation. "And there is no reason why I should give up my belief for the sake of yours. I don't ask you to stay away because I don't want to go."

"That's enough," his father broke in. "You'll break your mother's heart one of these days, but you don't care. . . ."

"I know you will, Keith," his mother sobbed. "You have broken it already. . . ."

"I am sorry," Keith muttered, moved against his will, and yet as determined as ever. "I don't want to hurt you . . . but I can't help it."

XXXIX

ONCE only was the subject brought up again. A few nights later his father called to him to come into the livingroom for a moment.

"Did you really mean what you said the other day," the father asked.

"About going to communion?" Keith was on the defensive at once. "Yes, I did."

"Have you considered all the consequences?"

"I have," Keith asserted, wondering at the same time what they might be.

"Well," his father persisted with deliberation, "perhaps you have. . . . But you will regret what you do now. You are shutting yourself off from all sorts of things. . . . It is certain to count against you sooner or later. . . ."

"But when I don't believe in it?" Keith was looking at his father almost aghast. "Do you wish me to act against my own convictions? Wouldn't that be. . . ."

"Poverty and convictions don't go together," his father cut him short in a tone of indescribable bitterness. "As I told you before . . . you have still a lot to learn. But I suppose you must learn it in your own way, so I shall say no more about it. Your mother . . . it has almost made her sick . . . but she must get accustomed to it."

That was the end of it. Keith tried to tell himself that he was a brute, but at heart he felt a strong glow of satisfaction. He had taken a definite stand

in opposition to his father's will, and he had carried the day. Much more was involved than appeared on the surface. In addition he had got an impression that things done on the plea of moral or religious conviction were placed on a level of their own and given a consideration not accorded to ordinary actions. It was an idea that opened interesting possibilities. All in all, he could well feel that he had won a victory foreshadowing others of still greater significance, and with the ruthlessness of youth he began at once to pursue the advantage gained.

Having no friends to visit at night, there was no reason for him to stay out late. Yet he chafed under the parental restraint which required him to ask leave before going and set an hour for his return before he was permitted to go at all.

One night he broke bounds without giving notice in advance. Having stayed with Aunt Gertrude until she closed her shop at an hour somewhat later than usual, he walked home . . . but instead of turning into the familiar doorway, with its long, half-lit corridor, he went right down the lane to the Quay, strolled deliberately, although with a sinking heart, past the Royal Castle, which loomed darkly against the pale northern summer sky, and on across the North Bridge. There he stopped to hear a military band play gay waltz tunes in the open air restaurant at the foot of the bridge. Men and women were leaning against the stone balustrade, listening as he did, and whispering softly to each other. Here and there he could see a male arm twined around a good-sized female waist. It was disgusting, he thought . . . and disturbing.

He tried hard to enjoy his rebellious freedom, but his feet seemed bent on turning him homeward in spite of himself. It took a strong exertion of will to prolong his truancy until after ten.

"You'll catch it this time," Granny whispered the moment he appeared in the kitchen door . . . for all his pleas to be given a key to the little hallway leading straight into the parlour had fallen on deaf ears.

"Why should I," Keith asked with assumed innocence, but he could feel his heart thumping like a steam engine.

"You'll see," she announced with evident concern, and the thumping in his breast grew a little more violent.

"Where have you been," his mother demanded the moment he entered the livingroom. Her face was very pale, with little red spots showing on either cheek.

"For a walk," Keith replied, taken somewhat aback . . . he had expected the attack to come from the father.

"And you don't care how much you make me suffer in the meantime," she went on, her voice threatening to break.

"I don't see why you should," Keith rejoined desperately. "I am no baby any longer, and I can't see why I shouldn't stay out an evening if I want to."

"Yes," his mother flared back at him, her voice sharp and icy again, "it is as your father said the other day. You'll break our hearts, and you don't care!"

The father had been listening in silence, but with an expression on his face that caused Keith almost to forget the presence of his mother. There was a little sadness in it, and a certain grim resignation, but also something else . . . something that was almost akin to mirth and seemed to say to Keith:

"Yes, my boy, I know all about it . . . I have been there myself, and now it's your turn."

When he really spoke, however, he turned to his wife and said in a curiously toneless, yet conciliatory voice:

"No, Anna, it's of no use. And getting angry will make it no better. The young bird will leave the nest sooner or later, and our fledgeling is feeling his wings. We are growing old, Anna, and we had better acknowledge it."

The mother groped for her handkerchief. Keith shifted uneasily from one foot to another, his glance clinging expectantly to his father.

"I don't want to go out," he said at last, "if I only know that I can go if I want."

At the same time a voice within him seemed to whisper: "But I am going out all the same, and you know it."

"All right," he heard his father say, "we'll see what can be done about it."

XL

FOR two weeks nothing occurred. Everything ran along in the old grooves. Keith felt rather hopeless and quite disinclined to break over the traces again.

Then the most unexpected thing of all happened. It was like an earthquake.

Coming home for lunch one day, he was met by his mother with the challenge:

"I give you three guesses, and if you can guess the news . . . but you never can, if you try a thousand times."

He had not seen her so excited for a very long time, and it was plain that her excitement was wholly pleasurable.

"Oh, mamma," he urged, infected by her spirit, "what is it?"

"We are going to move!"

"Move," Keith echoed, hardly trusting his own ears. It was too preposterous.

"Yes, move like any other restless fools," Granny put in from her place in the kitchen. "But I think you'll have to bury me first. Putting old wine in new bottles is a waste."

"Where," Keith inquired, unheeding of Granny's too familiar grumblings.

"To West Long Street," his mother explained triumphantly. "Your father has made an arrangement with the bank so that we can rent an apartment. It will be much nearer to the bank, and to your office,

too. You'll have a room for yourself . . . a room that opens direct on the landing . . . but you must promise me . . ."

"Don't worry, mamma," Keith broke in impatiently. "Can we go and look at the place at once?"

Days full of happy excitement followed . . . of planning and conferring, of bargain hunting and jubilant discoveries of "just the thing wanted." Keith and his mother vied with each other in ingenious exertions. Even the father caught something of their ardour. Granny alone remained sulkily passive, but no attention was paid to her.

What had seemed in advance a fatal tearing up of roots became a lark. Nothing good could be said for the dreary old house where they had lived so long . . . fifteen years in all . . . or so long that Keith could not recall having lived anywhere else. They had almost appeared a part of the old place in the narrow lane with its glimpse of bright or gloomy waters at the foot of it . . . and now they couldn't get away from it fast enough. . . .

"That's life," Granny muttered, "and I wish I were moving to my grave instead."

The new apartment occupied the top floor of a very narrow and funny little stone structure at the corner of West Long Street and a mere streak of a winding, canon-like lane that connected Great Square with one of the market places along the fresh water harbour. It had three rooms in the front part, facing on the street and communicating by a long passageway with the kitchen and one more room facing the lane . . . a room so tiny that to any one but a boy filled with

Keith's wild craving for independence and seclusion, it would have seemed worse than a prison cell.

On that cubicle Keith concentrated his whole attention. In spite of its minute size, it had two doors and a window, so that furnishing it became a problem in fractional geometry. But Keith had never faced a more interesting task, and his mother helped him with a hungry gleam in her eyes that spoke of new hopes.

When everything was ready and the day of moving dawned at last, Keith had managed to find place in his cubby-hole for a chiffonier, a small stand with a lamp on it, a sofa that could be made up as a bed at night, a washstand, a book-rack, a real writing table of very modest dimensions, and a high-backed chair of carved oak that fitted particularly because of its shallow seat. With everything in its place, he had some difficulty in finding space for himself, but the impression it made on him was one of vast magnificence.

At last they were moved. The father and the mother resided in the front rooms at the other end of the apartment. Granny had immediately taken up her accustomed place in the kitchen, complaining with unusual intensity about the smallness of all its proportions. They would have to do without a servant. Keith's room was next to the kitchen, but the door to it could be locked, and Granny could be trusted. His room also had a door of its own to the landing, with a latchkey that rested securely in his own pocket. And he had his own key to the street door,

too, so that he could come and go quite independently of the rest of the family.

"Yes, now you are your own master," his father said that first night in the new home. "Let us hope that you don't use your mastery for your own undoing."

"Of course not," Keith rejoined happily. Their talk didn't bother him as long as he had what he wanted and could do what he pleased.

That first night he had to stay at home to put everything in order and to test out every feature of his new abode. But the next evening he left home immediately after supper, saying quite casually to his mother:

"I am going out for a while."

He noticed that she started to say something but checked herself.

When he was halfway down the passageway, he heard her call out after him:

"Good-night, if we don't see you again before we go to bed."

He had no idea where to turn. Vague thoughts of visiting some restaurant where they had music drifted through his mind as he swung from the lane into West Long Street and headed northwards. It would be grand to take a table all by himself, order a cup of tea or coffee with pastry, listen comfortably to the music and watch the people enjoying themselves all around. That would, indeed, be a proper way of celebrating his new freedom. But neither his cash nor his courage sufficed for such a venture.

And so he could do nothing but stroll along aimlessly until he reached the two parklike squares known

together as the Royal Gardens, where a band played at one end and large numbers of people promenaded back and forth along the gravelled walks or lolled leisurely on the benches.

The crowd of gay people, the talk and the laughter, the music . . . all combined to make him feel his own isolation the more keenly. Apparently there was company for everybody except for himself. He knew no one . . . could not even think of any one whom he might meet and greet. It was only by violent self-restraint that he kept himself from starting homeward on the run. And the victory he had won seemed quite empty. . . .

But when he let himself into the house with his own key as the clock of Great Church boomed out the hazardous hour of eleven, a sudden change of mood took place. He felt richly repaid for the tedium and the depression suffered in the course of that evening's conscientious debauch. Before closing the door again and locking it from the inside, he stood for a while in the doorway gazing idly up and down the dark and deserted lane.

And as he took in that limited and highly uninspiring vista of beetling stone walls, he felt sure at last that a gate had opened in front of him, and that he had passed through it for ever. How far it would let him advance remained yet to be seen, but it was behind him for ever . . . the whole past was left behind . . . and what lay waiting in front of him was new at least.

PART TWO

I

WHEN, later in life, Keith looked back at the years immediately following their removal to a new home, he always saw them as a journey in easy stages through a rather flat landscape, without any inspiring vistas and without any exciting incidents. Yet it seems fair to conclude, from our still more advanced point of observation, that they were richer in inner development and genuine experience than many subsequent periods of greater external activity.

The change wrought by that transplantation into a totally new domestic environment was tremendous . . . greater even than that accompanying his transition from the school to the office. It implied more than relief from the pressure of being packed so close together within such narrow quarters. Ruts that had been worn so deep that deviation from them had become impossible were suddenly obliterated. Habits hallowed by their origin in years so distant that Keith's memory did not cover them were broken up as if by magic. Their entire life in common had to be started afresh, and that clean sweep finished a parental authority that could never have been outlived as long as not only every object, but the very position assigned to it, suggested a time when Keith was a baby without will or purpose of his own. For good or bad,

the change set him free, and temporarily at least his spirit profitted greatly by it.

Thus a certain equilibrium was established. It was not as stable as it seemed at first. It did not last very long. But when the unrest that was an integral part of his soul broke loose again, it took new forms. He had always been seeking for something that he lacked . . . sometimes knowing what it was, and sometimes not. Soon that everlasting search was driving him onward again. But whereas formerly it had been negative only, if not actually destructive, it began now to assume constructive forms. Freedom is a fundamental thing, but it provides only for another start. More essential by far is the use of the newly gained freedom for the gathering of emotional and intellectual material out of which a soul may be built. It was on such a search that Keith embarked the moment he had shaken down into his new quarters and found that his parents really meant to leave him free to run his life according to his own desire.

His search was twofold . . . aiming at the satisfaction both of head and heart. He was still lonely, but no longer with a sense of hopelessness. Having broken out of the magic circle woven about him by the spells of infancy, he was now anxious to break in again . . . somewhere, into something. The companionship of the home had never quite satisfied him. His few attempts at finding something more appropriate to his nature outside the home had been dismal failures. Now he was bent on having what he had missed so long, and, thanks to the new situation at home, he could look freely for what he wanted.

At the same time he had grown conscious of other needs, always present within him, but until then in such vague form that he had not realized their true bearing. So far he had only felt. His life had been a succession of moods, alternating with more or less futile efforts at finding external causes for the comfort or discomfort associated with each mood. His religious crisis and the reading that brought it to an end had changed all that. He had begun to think in a true sense at last, and though a long time was to pass until he became fairly proficient in that difficult art, the urge of it had caught him.

He had read voraciously from the time he was seven, but rarely with any other purpose in mind than to while away the time and to find escapes from a reality that had no power of holding his attention. Negative as was the literature that restored him to a fair degree of self-respect and self-confidence, it had sufficed to open perspectives that made his former casual reading seem unsatisfactory. He was no longer content to live vicarious existences as unreal as his own pictures of the real life he had never tested. He wanted more than wish-fulfilling fairy tales. He wanted to know. And by and by he learned that the way to knowledge is study.

To his surprise, he caught himself thinking of the old school in a new way. Like his home, it had seemed a prison out of which he could not break fast enough. The first suggestion of a change in this attitude had come when he discovered that Pastor Soop thought more of him because of his years at Old Mary. Now he began to wonder whether, perhaps, his father

might have been right in telling him that he would regret his premature escape from the hated school bench.

He had seen little of his former schoolmates. He did not know what they thought of him and his sudden departure from their little world of text books, lessons and examinations. Now and then he met one of them on West Long Street and exchanged a casual greeting. But such encounters were never voluntary on his part. He avoided them if he could. So far his reason for shunning his former associates had been that they reminded him too painfully of his last year in school . . . . of things that he dreaded to face as part of his own experience. Now he feared meeting them because a voice in his heart whispered to him that they continued to enjoy opportunities which he had recklessly thrown away. He envied them, in other words. And so he wasted much time trying to persuade himself that he was better off than they, while simultaneously he began considering chances of making up for the loss he had suffered in leaving them.

Thus it will be seen that, in spite of the great improvement in his mode of living, and in spite of the complete removal of factors that had formed a constant source of irritation, there was enough left in his system of "divine dissatisfaction" to save him from any danger of stagnation.

II

KEITH had been living in the new place a couple of months when Herr Brockhaus one day looked up from his position at the other side of the big desk and said:

"How did you do it, Keith?"

"What," asked Keith, wholly at a loss to grasp the purport of that inquiry.

"Your handwriting," his employer explained. "I thought you hopeless in that respect, and now . . . I wouldn't call it a good hand yet, but it's really quite decent."

"I don't know," Keith muttered, blushing equally from pleasure and embarrassment. The truth was that he did not know how it had happened.

He had striven so hard and so helplessly to make his otherwise far from awkward fingers shape the various letters of the alphabet according to approved patterns. He had filled thousands of white sheets with moral mottoes and commercial phrases culled from the copy-books, and the failure of the thousandth was as dismal as that of the first. He had even, at the instigation and expense of Herr Brockhaus, attended a course of evening lessons at a highly esteemed calligraphic institution, and had been humiliated by his inability to keep pace with mere "knee-breech brats" at his side.

And then, all of a sudden, as Herr Brockhaus had observed, and without special effort on his own part, his hand had grown steady. Skill that had defied all

his efforts seemed to come without effort. It was almost an over-night development, leaving him the possessor of a clean, legible hand, which by more careful analysis might have been proved a cross between the handwritings of his employer and his father.

Keith wondered, but accepted thankfully the boon thus bestowed on him by unknown powers. It did not occur to him to trace any connection between his new proficiency and the sudden cessation of a conflict that had formed part of his existence as far back as he could remember. Nor did he recall in this connection that, after leaving school as one of the puniest of its five hundred pupils, he had shot up to practically full stature in a little more than a year.

III

AUNT GERTRUDE was in her usual corner seat by the window when Keith happened to drop in one afternoon. A lady with a thin, drawn face and a pair of cold, shrewd eyes was seated on the sofa in the rear of the shop. Beside her sat a girl of about fifteen, looking like a slightly reduced replica of her mother. Outside the counter stood another girl, older, unusually tall, with large but very regular features, very red lips, and a pair of eyes that made Keith think of the blue lakes that dot every typical Swedish landscape.

"I am glad you came in," said Aunt Gertrude. "This is Fru Walter, of whom I have told you, you know . . . and these are her daughters, Lisa and Alice."

"So this is Anna Wellander's boy," Fru Walter remarked, holding out a skinny hand to Keith. "It's a long time since I saw your mother. How is she?"

Keith managed some commonplace. He had one wish . . . to get away. The eyes of those two girls embarrassed him in a fashion never previously experienced. Both looked at him smilingly, but there was a great difference in their smiles. He could notice it in spite of his confused state of mind. That of Alice, the younger, was ironic, even a little malicious. That of Lisa was placid and kindly.

"You must come and see us soon," he heard Fru Walter saying, and she gave an address to which he paid no attention whatsoever.

"Thank you," said Keith dutifully, "but now I *must* go . . ."

"Run along," cried Aunt Gertrude with a funny gleam in her eyes that seemed for once not to look past him. "You'll see them again here, if not elsewhere."

In Swedish fashion, Keith shook hands with all his new acquaintances before he left. The hand of Alice was as skinny and nervous as that of her mother. But Lisa's hand was quite different . . . large and soft and warm and yet firm. For a moment it rested in his own. He seemed to feel it with every part of his body.

"Good-bye," he cried at last, running out of the shop in a state of bewilderment that was surprisingly pleasant.

During the rest of the day he lived in a strangely disconcerting world. It was made up entirely of blue

eyes that gazed at him with a tender glow in their placid depths.

It was near bedtime before he thought of telling his mother about his encounter in Aunt Gertrude's shop that afternoon. She plied him with questions, to which he could give no satisfactory answers.

"Lisa is the tallest girl I ever saw," he remarked irrelevantly at last. "She looks like a maypole."

Then he returned abruptly to his own room and a book that seemed unbearably dull.

IV

HE had been granted another raise of salary and received now the gorgeous sum of forty *kronor,* or about eleven dollars a month. Twenty-five *kronor* was paid at home. The rest he kept for his own use. It was magnificent. As he never went anywhere, or spent anything except for an occasional piece of pastry, he had to consider carefully what to do with all that money. Habit of mind suggested books. He knew about second-hand bookshops, but had not yet learned how to use them properly, perhaps because, in spite of his omnivorous reading, he knew too little about books and authors to find his own in a place where nothing was thrust at him. Instead he discovered a regular book dealer with a good stock not far from the office.

When he timidly entered it the first time, his eyes fell on a big placard announcing a cheap edition of Walter Scott's novels in translation, to be published in fortnightly instalments. He had heard of Scott, and

he asked to see the parts of the work that had already appeared. "Ivanhoe" was among these and happened to catch his attention. That settled it. For a few moments he figured frantically. Then he closed the bargain and carried off a big bundle. It took care of his reading that winter, side-tracking his more ambitious intellectual pursuits for a while. His interest in everything English was re-awakened. and so was the old *wanderlust* that once had made him declare openly in school that he meant to become an explorer.

But it did not break out at once. He was pretty well contented with things as they were, not only at home but in the office. Herr Tverholm was still a disturbing factor, insisting on the now firmly established practice of treats at the expense of the petty cash account, and pestering Keith with requests for "loans" from the same source. It was always difficult for Keith to say no if he was approached with any sort of diplomacy, and Herr Tverholm knew that art as few. He and Keith might have a bitter quarrel one minute, and the next he would turn to the boy as if nothing had happened, flattering him, cajoling him, and frequently getting what he wanted. In his heart Keith harboured nothing but contempt for the bragging and blustering salesman, with his loud clothing and his quite unequivocal stories, but there were moments when he despised himself much more for not being able to resist.

All such feelings, however, were fleet and shallow. His mind was too pleasantly occupied to dwell long on the unpleasant features of his existence. And Herr Tverholm's visits never lasted long. Even when

he was in the city, he kept away from the office a good deal, and Keith suspected that he was nursing schemes of his own not related to the business of Herr Brockhaus.

His employer had changed in no way, but nevertheless the business was advancing little by little. Thanks to his improved handwriting, Keith was gradually admitted to more and more responsible duties. He had already begun to carry on part of the correspondence, and as his indexing of the copy-books gave him a chance to read all the rest, if he wanted, he was acquiring a fairly good idea of how the affairs of Herr Brockhaus stood.

Various signs indicated that they could have been in better shape. Keith never got his little monthly salary until he asked for it, and sometimes he had to take it in several instalments. By degrees he learned to watch for the proper time to ask for it, so as not to clash with the notes that fell due every so often. Whenever such an event impended, Herr Brockhaus became unusually active, and most of his activity took place outside the office. He came and went nervously. Large batches of dunning letters had to be hurried off to laggard customers. Very rarely did the required sum materialize until the day when it was needed, and sometimes only an hour or so before the final moment of grace. Then Keith would scurry off to the bank in a flutter, but with a sense of triumph as if he himself had gloriously surmounted a great difficulty.

If, as was mostly the case, the payment was due in the bank where Herr Wellander worked, the feelings of Keith were badly mixed. It soothed his self-feel-

ing to appear in front of the long counter in the guise of a customer, for even deputy-customers must be held above cashiers and tellers. On the other hand, he was apt to catch a glance of his father, and while he always greeted the sight of him eagerly when both were away from home, it cut him to the quick to see his father moving about as a mere attendant instead of being majestically enthroned in front of one of the big desks so conspicuously laden with coins and bills and documents of value. And after each encounter of that kind he turned to the teller concerned in his own transaction with a deference that was almost cringing.

In one way or another Keith had many chances to acquaint himself with the nature and workings of business, but the use he made of them never reached much beyond the immediate requirements of the business from which he derived his livelihood. Keith was not lacking in imagination, but his exercise of that quality depended on the degree to which his interest was aroused. And it is to be feared that business from the first failed to stir any interest in him whatsoever. His attitude to it was primitively personal. It was of great importance that the office machinery be kept going, because otherwise no money would come in, and if it did not, Keith himself would sooner or later be left out in the cold. But beyond that self-evident point he could not, or would not, see. Except in so far as business bore on his own fortunes, it was to him a silly game in which people engaged for reasons he could never quite fathom. They must in order to live, he supposed, just as he for the same reason must

spend long and laborious hours in the office of Herr Brockhaus, but on the whole he thought it a foolish waste of time and energy.

His mind was simply elsewhere, following other channels. He was as curious about everything as a sparrow, and so he might have become interested in business, too, if he had not had so much of it right under his nose. Sometimes he caught himself saying in a sort of rage: "My Lord, why didn't I stay in school?" Then he thought either of Lector Booklund and his Latin lessons, or else of the unread Scott volumes waiting at home with alluringly uncut pages, and in both cases his rebellious mood subsided into a thankful acceptance of a situation that could have been so much worse.

V

A COUPLE of weeks had passed after his first sight of Lisa Walter when he found her in Aunt Gertrude's shop again, but this time alone.

"You never called, Herr Wellander," she remarked promptly, holding out her soft white hand to him and looking straight at him with those dreamy blue eyes of hers.

Keith was saved from his own idiotic embarrassment by the mocking laughter of Aunt Gertrude.

"Herr Wellander," she mimicked, and it was Lisa's turn to blush. "Call him Keith, girl, and don't let him call you anything but Lisa. His mother and yours played together as children, and his grand-

mother and yours knew each other a good long while before that time."

"But we haven't had any chance to drink *duskål* yet," Lisa protested, her glance straying a little more shyly toward Keith, who stood gaping at her with no more speech at his command than a fence post.

"Well," declared Aunt Gertrude, "if you must be so formal, we'll settle that right here and now."

A bottle of wine and the required number of glasses appeared from somewhere under the counter and were placed on a little table beside the big black sofa in the rear of the shop.

"Now," she commanded when everything was ready, "go to it . . . and I'll see that no part of the ceremony is overlooked."

"Here in the shop," pouted Lisa, turning a shade redder than before.

"No one can see you from the street," Aunt Gertrude reassured her, "and no one will come in at this time of the day. But perhaps Keith doesn't want to?"

"Yes, I do," Keith rejoined in a tone that made both Aunt Gertrude and Lisa laugh.

Then he and Lisa stood face to face, glass in hand. Hooking their right arms, they raised their glasses and drained them to the bottom thus intertwined. Then they shook hands.

"I thank thee, Lisa," said Keith.

"And I thank thee, Keith," the tall girl replied.

There was a pause. The two young people looked at each other uncertainly.

"And the thou-kiss," Aunt Gertrude pressed them relentlessly.

Lisa's face bent forward ever so little. Keith ceased to see or hear. He felt something like the brushing of a wing against his lips. Then he heard Aunt Gertrude cry:

"Good for you, Keith!"

Lisa had turned away, and for a moment Keith feared she was angry, but in another second she turned toward him again with the question:

"When *are* you coming to see us? Mamma told me to remind you, if I should happen to meet you, and my grandmother is very anxious to see you."

So a date was set.

That night Keith said to his mother:

"Lisa Walter is not quite as tall as I thought she was the first time I saw her."

VI

DURING the next few weeks even the magic wand of the great Scotsman could not divert Keith from his new preoccupation.

His first visit at the Walter home having proved a success, others followed, and soon Keith was trotting up to King's Hill as often as decency permitted.

Enkefru Hansell, the grandmother, turned out to be a white-haired little lady with a brittle voice and a good deal of fun in her frail body. She started teasing Keith about Lisa before he had been there an hour, and then she added mischievously:

"But, of course, she is two months older than you, so that you had better not think of her in earnest."

"Grandmother," cried Lisa reprovingly.

"Does that really matter," Keith asked a moment later, and everybody laughed until he wished he could sink through the floor.

Lisa played the piano. It was Keith's first real introduction to music of a more intimate kind, and he could not get enough of it. Chopin was her favourite composer, and she ended her first little program with his "Funeral March."

The sombre, yet soothing majesty of it seemed to pull the very heart strings out of Keith. He listened with parted lips and wet eyes. When the last note had died away, he sat still for a moment until the stored-up tenseness found vent in a deep sigh.

"That came from the heart," jeered Alice.

But Lisa turned to him and asked softly: "Did you like it?"

"I think it's the most wonderful thing I ever heard," he answered. "I want you to play it for me again . . . soon."

"Whenever you want," she said, letting her white fingers run idly along the keys.

Then they danced, and Keith had his first lesson in waltzing. It left him so humiliated that the whole evening was almost spoiled by it.

"You don't seem to catch the rhythm of the music," Lisa expostulated. "If you do that, the rest is nothing at all."

"Oh, you're too tall for him," Alice broke in mischievously. "He should be dancing with me."

"I don't think Lisa is taller than I," Keith protested, and so they had to compare heights, standing back to back.

"Yes. Lisa is almost a whole inch taller," Frau Walter decided.

"But I am still growing." Keith blurted out to the usual accompaniment of delighted merriment.

At last sandwiches and milk were served. It was hard to break away when they had eaten, but Keith discovered suddenly that it was eleven o'clock, and Enkefru Hansell had withdrawn to her own room quite a while ago.

That was a fair sample of his evenings with the Walters. Sometimes two of Lisa's cousins, Tor and Frida Olinder, appeared. No one else ever came. Games were played at times, and Keith hoped vainly for another kiss from Lisa when the forfeits were redeemed.

There could be no doubt that Lisa liked him, and he could not see enough of her. Best of all he liked to lean over the piano when she was playing and watch her fingers glide and leap over the bobbing keys. Then he did not have to speak.

Was he in love? He didn't know. But the teasing to which he was subjected both at the Walters and at home did not displease him. If it was love he experienced, then it was a very pleasant sensation, indeed, and he had no objections to its indefinite continuation.

VII

ENKEFRU HANSELL celebrated her seventy-fifth birthday anniversary. It was a great day in the Walter family. A party was to mark the occasion, and Keith was invited, of course. There would be flowers and presents. One thing only was lacking . . . a poem directed to the subject of their homage and their felicitations. Fru Walter, who confessed to a gift in that direction, had tried and failed. Lisa told Keith about it with grief in her voice.

"I'll try," said Keith rashly.

"Oh, you are a poet," asked Lisa, large-eyed.

"N-no, but I'll try," Keith sputtered.

And he succeeded to his own astonishment. The metre may have limped a little. The rhymes were not perfect. But it read well, and it was a real poem in three stanzas beyond all doubt. It told its object what a sweet old thing she was, how everybody loved her, and how they would grieve if they ever lost her . . . which was not likely to happen for another quarter of a century. In other words, it was a typical effusion of its kind.

Keith tried it out on his mother, who was elated at her son's unsuspected gift and dejected because he had not dedicated his poetic firstling to herself. She told him something to that effect.

"Oh, I'll write one to you some other time," Keith promised, and regretted his promise even as he gave it. How could he know that he could do it over again?

At the Walters the poem was a still greater success. There no divided feelings checked the unstinted appreciation bestowed on it.

"So you *are* a poet then," Lisa said admiringly to Keith. "Why didn't you tell me?"

"How could I know," he asked naïvely. "And I really don't think you should call me a poet . . . yet."

But she insisted, and Keith admitted that he might become one if he kept at it . . . as he undoubtedly would.

It was a fatal seed, bound to sprout in due time.

But a fortnight later Enkefru Hansell departed this earth. The Walter family cut themselves off from everybody. Perhaps there were other reasons, too. Keith was not even asked to the funeral. Lisa did not appear in Aunt Gertrude's shop any more.

His glimpse of Eden had been brief indeed. For a while he mourned. Then other interests began to monopolize his attention.

VIII

HE had long known that they had relatives in America, and it always stirred his fancy to think of these. A grand-uncle of his, another Wellander, had become interested in Mormonism and emigrated to Utah in the late forties. There he had married, they knew, though not more than one wife, they hoped. Anyhow, he was never heard of again.

On the other hand a certain amount of communi-

cation had been kept up with some of his mother's kin who had settled in Chicago at a much later date. There were young people among them . . . several girls that must be of Keith's own age. Under the impulse of his renewed interest in Sir Walter Scott, and additionally urged by the vacuum which Lisa's disappearance had caused in his life, he managed to obtain the name and address of one of those distant girl cousins and wrote her a friendly letter.

The response came quickly in the shape of a letter and a tintype. The letter was in Swedish, but the spelling and the grammar as well as the handwriting mystified Keith considerably. Both his mother and father spoke a Swedish that could have been heard anywhere without provoking criticism. His mother's spelling was a little weak, as he had found out the day he let her do one of his themes in school, but her choice of words was refined, and her enunciation was uncommonly clear and pure.

In this letter from America on the other hand . . . Keith turned to the tintype for consolation. It showed a distinctly pretty face, though perhaps a little weak, under a very large and fashionable hat. Thus reassured, he returned to the letter and decided to let its form pass unnoticed so that he might take the more pleasure in its extremely friendly tone. It gave an account of all the members of the family . . . people of whom Keith had never heard, and in whom he took no interest whatsoever. Finally the fair writer urged Keith to come to the great land of opportunity, where they were all doing very well, and where he could surely do better than in Sweden. If he came, he

would be sure to meet with a gracious welcome from one person at least, namely his devoted cousin, Alvilda Ling.

The letter was very naïve. But so was Keith . . . frightfully so for his age. He took it all literally, and promptly developed his first attack of what in Sweden is known as the American fever. Nothing would do but immediate emigration. There was some trouble about the language, of course. He had studied a good deal of German and some French in school, though he had not learned to speak either one of those tongues with any ease. Of English he had only had one hour a week during his last school year . . . or just enough to convince him that he liked it better than the other two. There seemed to be some sort of ingrained affinity between himself and the tongue of Shakespeare. So far he had done nothing to develop it. Now the time had come, he knew, and spurred by this enthusiasm he persuaded an old schoolmate, Herman Larsson, to give him a few free lessons in the coveted language.

He broached his intentions to his mother, who first wept and then had a vision of her son as President of the United States or something like that. He talked more guardedly to his father, who asked him where he hoped to get the money for the ticket across. Finally he even ventured a hint to his employer, who promptly informed him that, from the beginning of the next year, his salary would be fifty *kronor* a month.

At that juncture, when Keith was beginning to foresee another great mental conflict, and when he and Herman Larsson had arrived as far as the fourth paragraph of Washington Irving's "Rip Van Winkle,"

there came another letter from his cousin Alvilda urging him to come in time to attend her wedding to a young Swedish-American business man bearing the well-known American name of Smith.

Keith was unavoidably detained when his next session with Herman Larsson came due, and the latter never could understand his sudden loss of interest in English. The tintype, which had been framed and placed on his writing desk, was chucked into a corner, giving place to a cylindrical section of wood with the bark still on the outside. Into the top of this he had carved the motto of a famous French actress just found in a newspaper: "I will!" He did not know that it was also the motto of Chicago.

But the promise of a new raise remained a solid reality, showing him that day-dreams sometimes come true in an unexpected manner. What, after all, was America in comparison with fifty *kronor* a month?

IX

THEN Keith met Gunnar Krook, who introduced him to what became the dominant spiritual influence of his adolescence.

Krook was confidential clerk and distant relative to a wealthy dealer in men's ready-made clothing and about a year older than Keith . . . an aspiring soul who combined his kinsman's practical instincts with a hankering for intellectual and literary consolations.

When and where and how they met was forgotten by Keith soon after the event had taken place. All he remembered was holding back a little at first on

account of the close connection between ready-made clothes and the tailor's trade. In fact, the big store of Krook's uncle, or whatever degree of kinship he possessed, had an order department attached to it. And Keith had long ago grown tired of the peculiar kind of irony with which life pursued him. The very building where the Wellanders lived, for instance, was owned and, with the exception of their own presence on the top floor, exclusively occupied by a man grown wealthy in the same way as Krook's prosperous relative. Herr Sandgren sold ready-made clothing on the ground floor, made clothes to order on the second floor, and lived on the third with a fat and jolly housekeeper said to be also serving his conveniences in other ways. It was disgusting, Keith thought, and the more so because in Sweden at that time the use of ready-made clothing was very new and held quite beneath the dignity of any one counting himself at all a gentleman.

But Krook had a large library full of books that challenged Keith's curiosity. He also thought a good deal of Keith's own collection, where novels and books of adventure still predominated, and he was a free-thinker. Furthermore, he was not employed in his relative's clothing store, but in his private office on an upper floor. Moved by all these considerations, Keith decided at last that he could not afford to let his own impatience with a certain one-sidedness on the part of life stand in the way of an attractive new friendship.

X

THEY had only known each other a couple of weeks when Krook asked Keith if he had heard of Dr. Allan Malmberg, the apostle of Positivism in Sweden.

"What is it," asked Keith with a grin, for in addition to its universal meaning the word positive in Swedish serves also to designate a hand-organ of the kind that in association tests normally connects with Italian.

"A sort of religion invented by a Frenchman named Auguste Comte," explained Krook.

"Religion," sniffed Keith.

"Yes, but it's different," his friend hastened to interpose. "It has no god."

"That's funny," Keith cried. "How can there be a religion without any god?"

"Oh, yes, there can, because religion is a feeling, and we have feelings about all sorts of things. This man Comte says that we should feel about humanity what people generally feel about God."

"But why should we feel that way at all," Keith insisted. "I don't."

"You do, but you don't realize it. Everybody does. And so Dr. Malmberg says that Comte says that, as we cannot get rid of our feelings, we should try to direct them properly."

"It sounds awfully complicated, and I don't think there is much to it. Why should you get rid of one superstition in order to set up another in its place?"

"But you don't get the point," Krook protested rather impatiently. "Comte says that what we call superstition today was religion yesterday, and what we call religion today will be superstition tomorrow."

"Well, if that's so," Keith rejoined, "what's the use of bothering about it at all?"

"We have to," Krook came back almost in despair. "That's the way we are made . . . or that's what Comte says at least, although I am not very sure about it either. But if you'll come with me to hear Dr. Malmberg next Sunday, you'll know all about it."

"Sunday," Keith echoed uneasily. "Does he preach?"

"Well, not exactly," Krook hesitated. "He talks, and they sing hymns that have been made over, and that kind of thing . . . all of which I think is just bunk. But he's a slick talker, I tell you . . . almost too slick for me . . . I must admit that I don't quite like the way he gets around me when I know there is something wrong somewhere in what he says."

"Do you really think it's worth while," Keith asked, still doubtful.

"I do," Krook asserted.

And so it was agreed that they should meet next Sunday morning and go together to the hotel where Dr. Malmberg and his little Positivistic congregation held their weekly meetings.

XI

THE room was not very large. Rows of plain chairs filled the centre of it. Between twenty and thirty people occupied these in scattered groups. A majority were men, and young. Most of them looked to Keith like artisans of the better class. A few of them were whispering among themselves. As a rule they sat looking stolidly ahead. The atmosphere was not stimulating.

Placards with mottoes, black on white, were hung on the walls. One of these was the first thing in the room to catch and seriously hold Keith's attention. "Live in the open day," it said. The words became instantly engraved on his memory. He could not tell why they impressed him as they did, but they seemed to embody something that was an integral part of himself, though not previously realized.

At one end of the room, farthest from the door, was a table with a chair behind it, turned to face the audience. In an adjoining corner stood a small organ, with its bench now occupied by a rather heavily built middle-aged lady who proved to be Fru Malmberg. She had formerly been married to a count, Krook whispered, but had fallen in love with Dr. Malmberg when he was nothing but a poor philological student, and had run away with him.

Interesting, Keith thought, but quite foreign to what he had come for. Then he looked at that motto again. Perhaps that was what it meant.

The lady at the organ was surrounded by an air

of general detachment which only disappeared when, now and then, she glanced a little nervously toward a man seated apart from the rest by one of the windows.

"That's her husband," Krook whispered again with a nod toward the man by the window.

Keith was fascinated by this man's hair. It was jet black, with blue glints in it, and glistened as if made out of spun glass. Then Keith passed on to the eyes . . . dark, quick, full of fire, now latent and now breaking into open flame. Turned straight at you, those eyes had an almost hypnotic power.

The principal impression of the man as a whole, however, was one of complacent self-satisfaction. The same quality coloured his voice when he rose briskly, took the chair facing the audience, and announced that the services would begin. The use of the word "services" gave Keith a slight shock, and the tone used in its utterance provoked inner resistances.

Nor was the beginning auspicious. The lady at the organ preluded somewhat absentmindedly and then launched straight into an old Swedish hymn tune, deliberate as the speech of a Swedish peasant. The audience took up the tune, using a text in which such words as "God" and "Providence" had been changed to "life" or "humanity." The changes did not make the tune more attractive to Keith. Once he had rather liked hymns because their slow movement gave him a chance to strike the true notes by catching them from the singer next to himself. But this passive attraction had changed into active dislike since he had become more acquainted with what he called

"real" music. Now he shivered a little and looked toward the door, but decided to stick it out.

Then Dr. Malmberg rose to speak again. Apparently it was the sermon of the day and connected with some special phase of Comte's teachings that remained undivulged to Keith. The expression of complacency still remained on the speaker's face but grew less and less pronounced as he went on. He seemed to forget himself in a complete surrender to the doctrines he was expounding. His features became etherealized. His eyes alternately blazed and smiled sardonically. He spoke with an ease and fluency and command of form that took Keith's breath away. His voice, very rich and mellow in itself, gathered force and passion from the words it uttered, but his very passion was intellectual . . . a production of the mind rather than the heart.

Keith was not a critical listener. A small amount of initial resistance, caused by the speaker's manner when not in action, was soon swept aside. Spellbound he drank in every word, and everything he heard seemed not only plausible but irrefutable. Tolerance was the key note of the whole speech. Under the pure, dispassionate light of reason, everything was seen to have warrant and validity in its proper time and place. But the world was a living thing, growing and evolving from day to day. What was good today had ceased to be such tomorrow. The fact that a creed or an institution had corresponded to the world's need at a certain stage of development was no reason for clinging to it superstitiously after it was outlived. The fact that it had become outlived was

no reason for denouncing it as an evil in itself, devised by self-interested schemers for the deception or exploitation of mankind. This applied to Christianity, and to all so-called revealed religions, as well as to everything else. Because man's mind was entering on its final stage of development . . . which might be called scientific or positive . . . all forms of belief based on emotion alone were doomed. In this final stage, man would concern himself only with what could be known. Positivism did not deny the existence of God or a life after this. Positively thinking men asserted merely that all such supernatural matters lie definitely beyond man's knowledge, and so it would be a waste of time and energy to worry about them when life was full of problems that could and should be solved by the rational application of man's mind. And so on.

It was the gospel of here and now, and as such it suited Keith to perfection. The tolerant attitude toward other forms of thought suited him still better. While the force of his reaction against certain emotional modes of thinking, incompatible with the logical workings of his own mind, had carried him temporarily into certain excesses of negation and opposition, he was at bottom particularly free from any tendency toward fanaticism, and it was with genuine relief he heard the eloquent doctor proclaim that fanatic denial was no better than fanatic affirmation. At the same time the speaker's frequent references to scientific theories or achievements lured Keith as so many glimpses of a promised land of which he had dreamt at times without daring to feel quite sure of its existence. With a keenness that was at once pain-

ful and pleasurable, he realized the extent of his own ignorance. But here, apparently, was a place where he might find a cure for it . . .

In one way or another he was caught . . . so completely that Krook felt obliged to tease him a little. For Krook, though probably far more ignorant than Keith, was more coldly skeptical, his questioning reserve being based not so much on a rational suspense of judgment as on the business man's instinctive unwillingness to let the other side get any undue advantages. In spite of his own preoccupation Keith had watched his new friend off and on during the address, and had noticed how he struggled almost physically not to be carried along against his own will by the speaker's flow of metaphor and argument.

Keith's temper was different. When he was attracted at all, he plunged headlong, leaving full consideration of his act to a time when his regrets of it had cooled his enthusiasm. That is what happened now. He felt that he had found what he had long been looking for, and he had no doubt that it would satisfy him for the rest of his lifetime.

When Krook had introduced him to Dr. Malmberg and Keith had been given a rather flattering reception, he blurted out:

"I want to become a member at once."

And it was with a pang of surprised disappointment he heard the doctor answer:

"That's impossible, I am sorry to say. The step is so serious that we require a period of probation. But you are most welcome to our meetings, and if later on you continue to feel as you do now, I don't doubt you will be admitted to full membership."

Fru Malmberg, who had watched them with languorous and indifferent eyes, now remarked in a tone which she vainly tried to make cordial:

"We have so many young men come here all on fire . . . and after a while they come no more. You had better take time to think. This is not a lecture course, but a religion . . . the latest and greatest in the world."

"I'll come back," Keith declared as he found himself politely dismissed.

"Are you a member," he turned on Krook.

"No," replied the cautious Krook, "And I don't mean to become one. Why should I, when I can get all they have to give without committing myself?"

Keith shook his head in puzzled disappointment. With him it was all or nothing.

XII

KEITH became a faithful attendant at those Sunday morning gatherings. He bought all the Positivist literature he could lay hands on. Comte was too abstruse for him. Instead he turned eagerly to a series of commentaries furnished by Frederic Harrison and other English disciples. Those he could digest, and from them his ideas about the new philosophic religion were chiefly derived . . . from them and from the long lucid talks of Dr. Malmberg. About once every other week he applied for membership in the society, and as often he was politely put off . . . to his continued astonishment, as he was

sure of having reached a spiritual harbour where he could safely drop anchor.

Incidentally he developed his first case of real hero worship. There was much about Dr. Malmberg to make such an outcome inevitable. The man had magnetism. His mind possessed a remarkable clarity and an almost encyclopedic equipment. To Keith, who had never before met a bona fide thinker in the flesh, he seemed for a while the most wonderful man in the world.

He was a prodigious worker, and his mind embraced with equal ease every human field . . . with the possible exception of art, toward which he showed the same polite reserve as toward Keith. He was a scientist and a politician, a philosopher and a practical reformer, a voluminous writer and a lecturer on many different subjects, all of them lying close to the heart of life as really lived. Under his guidance Keith began slowly to form ideas not only about the laws ruling the universe, but about the conduct of public affairs within the human group to which he naturally belonged.

Keith was ready to surrender, heart and soul, just as the other young men in the little host of worshippers appeared to have done already. But he was not permitted. Try as he might, with whatever degree of humility or enthusiasm, he found always an intangible wall between himself and the object of his devotion. Yet Dr. Malmberg unbent readily and cordially to others no more devoted than Keith. Some of these were university students of considerable promise. Others were poor and pitifully groping workers.

Social status evidently counted no more than intellectual equipment. Keith wondered . . . perhaps his surrender was not as complete as it appeared on the surface . . . perhaps he was still a victim of that effervescence which his first teacher in Old Mary, the gently cynical but inspiring Dally, had liked and checked. This quality had its attractive sides, but it was possible that Dr. Malmberg preferred to do the effervescing himself.

At any rate, Keith felt baffled and hurt. A repressed tendency to criticism reasserted itself. And Dr. Malmberg offered as many excuses for criticism as for admiration. He no doubt was sincere in his love for humanity, but he loved himself more. His vanity was a leaden ballast that every so often brought his finely soaring spirit back to the earth with a soul-sickening thud. In the midst of a lecture illuminated by deep historic insight he could suddenly turn into self-defensive tirades that more than smacked of megalomania. He preached universal tolerance, and preached it effectively, but he was vitriolically intolerant toward men of different opinions who seemed to stand in his way.

His main passion, apart from his allegiance to the Cult of Humanity, was the education of the workers. With this purpose in mind, he had inaugurated a splendid system of extension courses which had for their professed object not to *raise* the sons of toil from without, but to enable them to *rise* by their own efforts. But at the mere mention of Socialism or Trades Unionism, which had just made their appearance on the Swedish horizon, he literally frothed at the mouth. Socialism was denounced as a crassly materialistic

scheme which would do the workmen more harm than good, and which for that reason must be fought, tooth and nail.

The other young men had the appearance of accepting their leader unquestioningly as faultless. They might smile a little when his self-concern became too evident, but their smiles were compassionate as if they would say: "That's the result of his too hard labours on behalf of humanity and us." Where he went, they followed. His enemies and detractors were theirs. His very prejudices seemed to become theirs. Socialism, of course, was taboo with all of them. And in this case, at least, Keith was willing to go with the rest. He knew nothing whatever about those new economic theories, and the brand of liberalism preached by Dr. Malmberg seemed to him far-reaching enough. Yet he did not feel quite at ease on this point.

Keith was still too much engrossed with the development of his own individuality to trouble himself wholeheartedly about political issues. The coldly balanced objectivity marking the true Positivistic spirit had still a very precarious hold on his mentality. All his motives and judgments were naïvely subjective and anthropomorphic. And in spite of his superficial devotion to the gospel of universal tolerance, he remained crudely intolerant in personal matters. The narrowness and inconsistency of Dr. Malmberg's political prejudices might slip by unchallenged, if not unnoticed, but his little personal weaknesses could not . . . least of all when he failed to make similar allowances in regard to his slighted disciple.

Keith had not yet grown familiar with the Law of

Compensation, as Emerson named it, which seems to exact a payment of some sort for every gift granted by life, so that greatness in one direction must needs be accompanied by an element of smallness in another. Nor was he yet aware of the existence within himself of a quality which judged men and things æsthetically rather than ethically, and which, as a rule, functioned much more effectively in regard to others than in regard to himself.

So the day came, and came pretty quickly, when Keith's attachment to the principles of Positivism persisted in spite of the leader . . . which, of course, proved how deep that attachment really had become.

XIII

As was generally the case with Keith, he got almost everything he could get out of Positivism through the vigorous intensity of the first contact. The effect of his continued relations with its high-priest and devotees was merely cumulative.

How much he received, and what, he could not tell at the time. The profundity of the impression made on him did not become evident until years later, but it is safe to say that his mental bent was largely determined for life during those first feverish weeks when it seemed as if a key to all of life's riddles had been turned over to him for his personal use.

Unfortunately there was a not uncommon lack of connection between his intellectual and emotional existences. And while his brain was coloured, so to

speak, by the Positivist pigment, those lower nervous strata which rule our motives imperatively were not affected until long years of painful experience had driven home the lessons so easily acquired by his reason. Even at that, the benefits derived from his novitiate among the little group of worshippers at the shrine of an indifferent and perhaps even mythical Humanity must be deemed enormous.

Late in life, when its directional tendencies had begun to show more plainly, he tried to sum up those benefits as he then saw them.

First of all he learned to apply the historical perspective to everything, and especially to human behaviour. Life no longer appeared as a flat surface, but stretched backward into the mists of unrecorded history. It was a tree on which simultaneously appeared buds, flowers and fruits, tender sprouts and decaying limbs. Thus he learned to read the present in the light of the past so that he might foresee the future. The corollary to this lesson was tolerance with different opinions, as these must be held neither good nor bad in themselves, but more or less advanced, and for that reason more or less adapted to the needs of the passing moment.

His second lesson, and the one that struck the deepest roots in his mind, grew naturally out of the preceding one and concerned the relativity of all human experiences and formulations. In the light of that lesson, the absolute, after which man's mind was constantly hankering, became the devil of the endless drama of existence, while the first duty of all those aspiring to serve the powers of light was to keep their

judgments in a state of solution, so that their verdicts at any moment might be recognized as tentative and temporary.

The principle of evolution was implied in the earlier lessons, but by taking his first ideas about it from Comte rather than Darwin, Keith was enabled at an unusually early period to recognize that evolution is spiritual as well as material, that it operates from within as well as by external pressure, and that the very principle itself is as much subject to development as anything else in the universe.

From the treatment of all religions as mythological attempts at interpreting life, he was led to grasp the futility of all imaginary escapes from the reality surrounding us. Existence at any moment was based on facts that could neither be denied nor dreamed away. To be conquered, they must be faced, and in that struggle the victory came easiest to him who knew most about the facts confronting him.

In spite of their terminology, their rationalistic basis, and their refusal to consider problems held supernatural, the theories evolved by Comte showed a strong mystic strain, and it kept alive that side of Keith's nature . . . that "capacity for wonder" . . . which withered in so many other men of his generation. At a time when modern psychology was still in its infancy, Keith gained a pretty correct appreciation of man's emotions as causes rather than effects of his overvalued attempts at reasoning. Thus he was led to seek the explanation of men's actions in motives springing from life's most primitive instincts rather than in arguments formed retrospectively for their vindication.

It was, indeed, a valuable set of mental implements, acquired at a promisingly early stage of his life's journey. Unfortunately the set was not complete. A little plug was missing for the closing of the connection between his highly advanced philosophy and his highly primitive impulses in moments of stress. A proper kind of personality back of the theories might have furnished that plug. As Dr. Malmberg failed in this respect, it had to be fashioned painfully and slowly and empirically out of the contents offered him by life, and the story of its fashioning is identical with the story of Keith.

XIV

TO the astonishment of Keith, his father had also begun to discuss politics. He was thoroughly aroused, and the intensity of his feelings infected Keith to some extent.

Sweden was changing from an agricultural to an industrial nation, and the usual results were developing. Liberalism of a modern kind was gathering headway, slowly but surely. A cry for higher customs duties, and particularly for duties on food stuffs, had been raised by a strange combination of manufacturers and merchants, big land-owners and peasants. It furnished the needed rallying cry for the small middle-class people and the city workers. Everybody took sides for or against protection.

Keith's father was a free-trader. He denounced the demand for a high tariff as systematized robbery by those who already had enough or too much. He

moved about restlessly and his speech grew fluent when this topic agitated him. It rather pleased Keith, but it also perplexed him. He thought that, on the whole, his father overdid it.

One night, while the tumult was at its highest, he had to stay at the office later than usual because Herr Brockhaus had been away most of the day and wished to catch up on his neglected correspondence. In the midst of it, Herr Kjellin dropped in, and soon the two men were engaged in a vivid conversation which Keith could not help overhearing from his place at the opposite side of the big desk. Politics was the topic. Herr Kjellin had attended some sort of meeting, and he was still full of it.

"Those free-traders," he cried at last, "are just a set of idiots."

"They are worse," rejoined Herr Brockhaus more deliberately. "They want to ruin the country for the sake of saving a few paltry *kronor*."

"But to hear them talk," his friend chimed in, "you would think that we were highway robbers in disguise."

"Of course," Herr Brockhaus went on, now quite heated, too, "there is nothing but the worst kind of rabble on that side."

That was too much for Keith, who had been listening with a bitterness of feeling new to himself.

"My father is a free-trader," he blurted out, his face red, his voice choking a little, his eyes ablaze. "And I don't think you have a right to talk of him as an idiot or a criminal. He's the most honest man I know, and I'm sure his opinions are just as good as . . . as anybody's!"

For a moment the two men on the other side of

the desk looked as if a bomb had landed between them. If Keith had suddenly brandished a knife at them, they could not have been much more astonished or appalled.

"Well, well," said Herr Kjellin finally, smiling superciliously, and yet with a certain softening of his expression.

"Suppose you attend to your work," Herr Brockhaus remarked dryly. "Our talk is none of your business."

"It is, if you talk so that I must hear you," Keith cried unrepentant. "I don't want you to talk of my father like that."

"I don't want to. . . . " Herr Kjellin repeated sarcastically.

"Now you are making a fool of yourself," Keith's employer retorted, but not quite as sternly as before. "We were not talking of your father. The trouble is, you know nothing about politics. Now I don't want to hear anything more."

Keith was still breathing hard. Shame, fear, anger and a sense of triumph mingled into a sort of witches' broth within him. If those two men went on as before, he would have to leave. That was all there was to it.

But they didn't. Politics was dropped completely. Instead they talked of partnerships and contracts and capital and various other things that might have interested Keith greatly if he had not been so much upset. Now he caught just enough of their talk to feel relieved.

When he got home, he told his father all about the night's incident with a good deal of pride and expecting to be praised.

"Of course, they were wrong," his father remarked after hearing his excited tale to an end, "and they proved what the people on that side are like. But you had no right to break in as you did, and if Herr Brockhaus had discharged you on the spot, I could not have blamed him."

Keith looked at his father very much as the two men on the other side of that desk had looked at himself a little while earlier.

XV

THE old country, so long asleep, was stirring in many ways. A fresh morning breeze set the hollow old trees rustling dolefully, but it made the saplings stretch themselves and look expectantly at the half-hidden sky above. Preoccupied as he was with himself, Keith could not escape being touched by the general movement.

An errand of some kind took him to the Central Depot at Vasa Square one November afternoon. He was crossing the square in front of the House of Nobility on his way home, when his attention was attracted by a large crowd in front of the old Court House on his left. It was made up almost wholly of men, most of them young. They were very quiet. No demonstration of any kind was made. They just stood there looking at the Court House and waiting patiently . . . one might almost say hopelessly.

Keith stopped for a moment, but there was nothing to see, nothing to arouse his interest, and so he passed on. Just as he was about to enter Great New Street,

a subdued murmur passed through the crowd and made him turn back. A moment later half a dozen men came pouring out of the main entrance of the Court House and stopped on the stone stoop in front of it.

The man at the head of the group, whose features were made indistinguishable to Keith by the distance, raised his hat and shouted a few words at the top of his voice. Keith caught the name of Strindberg. Then the man's further efforts to speak were drowned by a roar from the crowd . . . a roar of joy mingled with anger that rose and fell, rose and fell, and then died away as suddenly as it had begun. In another couple of minutes the square was empty.

"What does it mean," Keith managed to ask a man hurrying away in the same direction as himself.

"He is free," that man shouted back.

"Strindberg," Keith queried.

"Yes, August Strindberg . . . the one man who dares to speak the truth in this damned country."

Then he was gone.

Later in the day Keith looked up Engstrand and learned that a criminal charge of blasphemy had been made against Strindberg on account of a volume of stories named "Marriage," and that a jury had found him not guilty.

Keith had read a few early stories and plays by this man Strindberg and had dipped into his "The Swedish People." That was all he knew about him. Now he was caught by the general excitement. He must read "Marriage."

"It's hot stuff," said Engstrand and promised to lend the book to Keith.

Those short stories became Keith's introduction to the literature of his own day. Until then he had read anything that managed to hold his attention. Now he became a partisan like all the rest, in spite of his Positivism, and works of imaginative literature were largely judged by their agreement with his own feelings and opinions.

The story of young Theodore in "Marriage," which had caused all the hubbub, seemed to Keith taken from his own life, though the external circumstances were different. Having read it, he seemed to understand himself better, and this understanding was the more welcome because it also constituted a vindication of his own actions and attitudes. Rebellious tendencies, he discovered once more, but now in much more concrete form, were not confined to himself. They were in the air, one might say, and they were to be cherished and fostered instead of suppressed.

He wanted more of the same kind, and he plunged into "The Red Room" and "The New Kingdom," liking the bitter scorn of the latter work in particular. He heard of other writers that must be read by any one claiming kinship with his own generation . . . and so Sir Walter Scott had to give way to Ibsen and Björnson, Jacobsen and Schandorph, Brandes and Kielland and Geijerstam. He heard of "Young Sweden" and of a new Scandinavism, literary and intellectual rather than political.

The past, of which he had always been so impatient, was ridiculed and condemned . . . and rarely in a spirit consonant with Positivistic ideals, but that did not seem to matter. High hopes were raised about a future just dawning. It was Keith's own spirit, and

he responded to it with a gladness that shed a consoling light even on his routine duties at the office. It was natural that he should . . . he, of whom Dally had once said that he was always in danger of "falling off forward."

XVI

AS a result of the Strindberg incident, Keith also began to give regular attention to the daily newspaper kept by his father. He read what he could find about the new literary movement and its principal exponents. The rest of the domestic news seemed trivial, and the political leaders bored him with their constant hints at things about which he knew nothing. The more eagerly he turned to the foreign telegrams with their concise statements of facts, and little by little he formed a picture of what was going on in the world outside of Sweden. It always seemed so much more exciting than life in his own country, where, as he heard some one express it, "nothing had happened for a hundred years."

Until then his impressions of the various European nations had been derived mostly from school histories and traditional prejudices. New love and old hatred fought for supremacy in regard to Norway and Denmark, but thanks to impressions received by his father as a volunteer sharpshooter when Charles XV wanted to assist Denmark against Germany in 1864, Keith was predisposed to an ardent Scandinavism, which now received an additional impetus from his reading of the new literature.

Russia was the "hereditary enemy" and the oppressor of Finland and Poland. Germany was viewed with deep resentment because of its victorious wars against Denmark and France. France, on the other hand, was not only the victim of "the crime of 1871," but the undisputed queen in the realm of the spirit. Italy was still the land of Garibaldi. England figured in his consciousness only as the land adored by his mother. America was not a nation, but a country to which one emigrated and where everybody was as good as everybody else. The rest of the world moved vaguely in the distance, with no clear details visible.

Keith's study of the news pouring in daily from all parts of the world gave him quite a different picture, although many of his inherited likes and dislikes remained unaffected. The change was largely one of emphasis. England, which had been little more than a sentimentally coloured name, became the chief object of his attention—the birthplace of representative government, the hope of modern democracy. Just then the Home Rule fight was raging fiercely, and it caught his fancy above everything else. Ireland took complete precedence of Poland, and almost of Finland, as a martyr to the cause of liberty. Yet this fact did not at all detract from Keith's growing admiration for England, which, above all, was the land of Gladstone . . . the one nation that admitted its own wrongs and strove voluntarily to right them. Gladstone was the supreme hero of democratic freedom and the greatest of all living men . . . with Parnell as a rather poor second. Where there is such love as Keith gave those two men, there must also be hatred,

and in his case it was centred on their natural enemies, the English Tories. If in those days Keith had been asked to suggest a plausible modern incarnation of the devil, he would probably have named the House of Lords.

This remained his international state of mind, so to speak, until one day Björnstjerne Björnson came to Stockholm to deliver his famous lecture on "Monogamy or Polygamy." The arrangements for the lecture had been made by Dr. Malmberg, and Keith attended with the rest of the faithful. The magnetic personality of the speaker and the glamour attached to his position as Ibsen's twin star impressed Keith more than the lecture itself. He agreed fully with the speaker's denunciation of "the double moral standard" for men and women, but he made reservations as to the character of the single standard recommended in its place. As a recent convert to Naturalism, Keith felt compelled to doubt the value of chastity.

That evening, however, Björnson was the guest of honour at a reception given by Dr. and Fru Malmberg, and rather to his surprise Keith found himself among those invited to attend. His social inexperience made him go with a great deal of misgiving, but curiosity and flattered vanity swept all hesitations aside. The earlier part of the affair, when Fru Malmberg tried to keep the lion to herself and a few of the select, augured badly. But such an arrangement was not in keeping with the guest's temperament. He was as inclusive in his attitude toward men as Ibsen was exclusive. To be the centre of a multitude was with him a natural necessity.

Before any one quite knew how it had happened,

Björnson was seated in a big arm chair placed in the middle of the floor, and around it all the rest were grouped . . . on chairs, squatting on the floor, standing. He talked and they listened spellbound. His powerful, yet kindly face; his leonine mane of grey hair; his eyes, in which bright sunlight and flashes of lightning alternated with dazzling rapidity; his massive figure lolling leisurely in the chair . . . all combined to form a picture that Keith could never forget.

Björnson spoke, but not of monogamy. He had visited America not long ago, and he was still full of it. To him America was Lincoln, and Lincoln was America as it ought to be and promised to be. He was going to write a big work about Lincoln, and he poured out details which he had collected with that purpose in mind. The "rail-splitter," the plain toiler who went to the White House and there died as the martyr of a great cause, became a living, moving, compelling reality. And the country . . . yes, it was the land of liberty, of opportunity, of growth . . . the land of youth and the land of the future . . . but above all the land of work.

"No one is ashamed of working over there," Björnson cried as his face took on a more eagle-like look than ever, "and they know how to work. If we could only learn to work as they do . . . God in heaven, we'd own the earth!"

He brought down his white, well-shaped hand with a Jovian crash on the support of the chair. His wife, sitting beside him, patted his sleeve gently, and in a somewhat lowered tone the great poet-politician resumed:

"If I were younger, I might go over there for good.

Think only of writing for millions, when here we have to be satisfied with thousands!"

Keith drank in every word, every gesture, every intonation, in a spirit of momentary self-forgetfulness that was bliss in itself. And when the end came, all too early, he sneaked away by himself to think in peace of what he had heard.

That evening caused a lasting readjustment of the international panorama formed in Keith's mind. England remained in the foreground as before, but back of it and through it he seemed always to see the more distant and still more desirable America. Gladstone was still the greatest man alive, but he was alive after all, and so he was not to be compared with the simple, uncouth, lovable, prophetically dreaming jester from the vast plains of Illinois, who had given his very life for the same cause . . . the never dying, never wholly victorious cause of freedom.

XVII

AS good luck would have it, Keith was in Aunt Gertrude's shop the afternoon when Lisa dropped in there for the first time in months. His old embarrassment was gone, but the pleasure of seeing her was as great as ever.

"What became of you," he cried. "Where have you been?"

"Out of the city," Lisa explained with her old placid smile. "Visiting with my aunt in the country. And then we have moved. You must come and see us very soon in our new place."

Keith asked for nothing better, and soon the old friendship had been resumed, Keith spending two and three nights a week with the Walters. The grandmother was no longer there with her gracefully old-fashioned little sallies. Fru Walter seemed a little softer, Alice a little more subdued. Lisa was the same as ever. Two more of the innumerable Olinder boys had joined Tor and Frida in Stockholm, and some of these regularly showed up, so that there was a lot of fun.

There was less teasing of Keith about Lisa, but it seemed generally accepted that he came for her sake and had a certain claim on her company. He didn't make love to her. He hardly knew whether or not he loved her. Away from her he was always a little restless and unhappy. In her company he was painfully happy, one might say. Best he liked to stand by the piano watching her as she played some favourite piece of music. Then she would sometimes turn her head and give him an enigmatically smiling glance that set him trembling gently from head to foot. And afterward he would walk home through a sort of fog that made everything about him look very soft and blurred. Inexplicable yearnings prompted him to do something, but to save his soul he could not tell what it was. But sometimes as he drifted across North Bridge and caught the perpetual swishing of the rapid waters beneath it, he might whisper to himself:

"I love her! I love her! I love her!"

It made little difference in his existence otherwise. His work, his reading and his attendance at the Positivist society went on as before. He tried to talk books with Lisa, but her interest in them was evidently quite

different from his own. More and more his mind seemed attracted by problems of life and living, while she seemed instinctively to shun problems of any kind. There was something indolent about her, and she hated to be disturbed.

At home they watched Keith's familiarity with the Walters with divided feelings. His mother was pleased to know his evenings safely disposed of. At the same time she was plainly jealous. There was no other intercourse between the two families. Keith was the only link of connection. And the social level of the Walters was undoubtedly above that of the Wellanders. Lisa's father was dead, and Keith never got a clear idea of what he had been or done in his lifetime. But Lisa's uncle and guardian was a wealthy merchant, of whose palatial residence Keith now and then heard glowing accounts. It made him a little uneasy at times, but he was too much taken up with Lisa herself to bother seriously about her relations, rich or poor, as long as they did not interfere with his seeing her as often as he wanted.

"Are you not afraid of wearing out your welcome," asked his mother one evening as he was preparing for another visit to the Walters.

"They asked me to come," Keith explained.

"Tonight, yes, but do they ask you every time you go there?"

"Aunt Walter has told me that I am always welcome, and so has Lisa."

"All right," his mother sighed, "but we hardly get a glimpse of you these days."

"If I stayed home," Keith rejoined, "I would be reading in my room."

"That's it," said his mother. "You are always absent . . . whether you are here or anywhere else."

"Well, what do you expect, Mamma," Keith broke out impatiently. "I can't sit in here doing nothing, can I?"

"I suppose not," admitted his mother wistfully.

But as he passed through the kitchen on his way out, he heard Granny mutter one of her old saws without looking up at him:

"No one should take a wife who has not got food for two."

XVIII

As time went on Keith became acquainted with the other young men who more or less regularly showed up at the Positivist Sunday meetings, and who, for that reason, were now and then invited to a late Sunday tea at the Malmbergs. One such evening six of them left together and decided on reaching the street to drop into a near-by restaurant for a glass of beer and some more substantial food.

As the big table around which they were grouped began to fill up with cold dishes, Keith noticed with some surprise and much relief how the faces of his companions grew brighter. He had thought of them as half saints and half mummies, always engaged in a laborious and ascetic pursuit of provisional, but more or less abstract truth. And now he discovered that they were quite human.

"Hem-hem," coughed little Klotz, the blind basket

weaver, discreetly. "I don't know how the rest feel, but I for my part would like to start with a little snaps."

"Hear, hear!" shouted Knut Held, the tall and handsome young botanist who used to play Beethoven *à quatre mains* with Fru Malmberg while she audibly counted the time.

"Those be words of true wisdom," said Harald Lützow, the medical student whose biological research work at twenty-three had already begun to attract flattering attention from the leaders of his profession.

Even Gunnar Krook came out of his shell of reserve and tried to joke: "It takes a blind man to see what we all need after such a dry evening."

But little Swensson, the journeyman upholsterer who guided the journeys of Klotz to and from the meetings and looked after the routine connected with Dr. Malmberg's lecturing, said dryly: "You do nothing but talk. . . . I called for a bottle of *brännvin* at the same time I ordered the beer."

At that moment a waiter arrived with a caraffe full of liquor that had the appearance of water and the qualities of liquid fire. Even Keith was so carried away by the spirit of the moment that he cheered with the rest and then joined them in draining his snaps to the tune of:

Here goes one!
Here goes one!
And he who fails on number one
Can never hope for number two!

The strong stuff made his throat smart and his eyes water, but it also loosened his tongue and set his brain working.

"Listen, fellows," he cried between two mouthfuls of anchovy sandwich. "At the meetings we do nothing but listen. Why shouldn't we have a debating club where we could do some of the talking ourselves?"

"Give him another, give him another," piped little Klotz. "It's making him brilliant."

"Like Verdandi at Uppsala," said Held. "It would be great."

Verdandi was the talk of the country and the horror of all Conservatives . . . a society of students formed not only to introduce liberal ideas at the university, but to popularize its learning for the benefit of the workers. There had been a big scandal about a radical lecture given under the auspices of the society, and a vain effort had been made to force the leaders out of the university.

"I must say," Swensson put in with the same dryness of tone as before, "that I should like to hear my own voice now and then."

"Of course, the doctor is all right," little Klotz remarked with feigned unctuousness, whereupon he stopped significantly.

"But . . . " Keith prompted him.

"So are we," Lützow broke in with his rare crooked smile that seemed to light up his pale scholarly face from within.

"What are we to debate," Held asked.

"Anything but religion," Krook cried.

"Except from the historical point of view," amended Klotz, who, as a true dialectician, was more fond of

a worsted antagonist than of a victorious ally.

"I have a crazy idea," Keith ventured.

"Didn't I tell you that it would pay to give him another drink," shrilled Klotz joyfully.

"Let's call ourselves 'The League of Youth' after that play of Ibsen's," Keith said. "And let's make it what such a league ought to be."

"Here's to the Wellander edition of 'The League of Youth,' " Held cried, raising his beer glass.

And that was the beginning of the first really satisfactory companionship experienced by Keith during that part of his life.

XIX

THOSE six met regularly one evening a week for a period of nearly eighteen months. Swensson got a small room at the Workers' Institute placed at their disposal free of charge. The room was lighted by two gas jets and contained nothing but a table and a dozen chairs. Yet it drew them more strongly than if it had been a magnificently furnished hall in the Royal Palace.

They never tried to increase their numbers, though now and then they were joined by Gustaf Hardin, another medical student, who worshipped Lützow and thought he was throwing himself away on such childish pursuits. They thought themselves sufficiently assorted as they were . . . two students, two clerks, and two manual workers, representing six radically different temperaments: Lützow, earnest and tolerant; Held, brilliantly flippant; Krook, always on the

defence lest he commit himself too far; Klotz, alternatively splitting hairs and dropping little pearls of empiric wisdom; Swensson, hiding a childish idealism behind a dryly practical surface; and Keith, groping, restless and effervescent.

Klotz acted as chairman. Keith as secretary took copious notes which he spent whole evenings putting into intelligible language. There was no topic under the sun that did not come up for discussion, either at the regular meetings or at the adjourned sessions held in some cheap restaurant over a sandwich and a glass of beer. They began by trying to determine the nature of life. When their meetings ceased at last, they were discussing whether to deny God was an inverted way of affirming his existence. One rule alone was established for their debates and rigorously enforced: that all arguments must be abstract, scientific and impersonal. And during that long sequence of furious debates, they never once lost their tempers and fell into plain quarrelling. A contradiction was regarded as a challenge, and not as an insult. To be worsted in argument was an honour if thereby the group as a whole might win a fraction of an inch nearer to a workable truth. No resolutions were ever adopted and no definite conclusions ever formulated. It was a course in clear and unbiassed thinking that might well be put in the balance against a dozen ordinary academic courses and not be found wanting.

As the debates constantly brought out gaps in the knowledge possessed by the various members, and as Keith seemed to feel his own educational shortcoming more than any one else, he turned to Lützow and Held for advice. Spurred by them, he first took up

Haeckel's "Natural History of Creation" and went through it faithfully from the first page to the last. Thus he became acquainted with Darwinian evolutionism, but thanks to his Positivistic training, he refused to accept the prevailing mechanical interpretation of it. What remained with him when he was through with "the gospel of materialism," was a general impression of a gradual, orderly process of development embracing all forms and functions of organic and inorganic life throughout the universe.

Later he studied chemistry and anatomy with Lützow, and botanic physiology with Held, both of whom took several hours a week of their scant leisure time to help him out. At home, by himself, he took up physics and algebra once more. For a time everything else was neglected. Even the Walters did not see him as often as they had become used to.

His mother was happy because he stayed at home evenings. His father watched him a little ironically, and one day he asked:

"Do you think that kind of stuff will make a good business man out of you?"

"Business man," Keith repeated as if waking from a dream. "I don't want to be a business man."

"And what instead, if I may ask," his father inquired.

"I don't know," Keith replied helplessly.

XX

KEITH had been driving himself too hard, and the results were becoming evident. He attended to his duties in the office and pursued his various studies as before, but with a certain listlessness that robbed him of the glow of satisfaction which he had come to expect as his due. As usual, he didn't know what was the matter, and, as usual, he tried to hold some external factor responsible for his trouble instead of seeking the cause of it within himself. Now he blamed the work in the office, of which, no doubt, he was heartily tired. Matters might have reached some sort of a climax but for the sudden ripening of the schemes with which Herr Tverholm had been busy so long.

A few days before he was to start on his regular summer tour through the southeastern part of Sweden, he sent Herr Brockhaus a curt letter containing his resignation to take effect at once. He never appeared at the office again, but sent a messenger for the few belongings of his still remaining there. It was impossible to get another salesman in time to cover the scheduled route for the next season. Herr Brockhaus read the letter in Keith's presence and was shocked out of his customary reserve to the extent of communicating its contents to his only remaining assistant.

"What in hell are we going to do," he cried finally, looking at Keith as if he expected the latter to furnish an immediate solution of some sort. Keith was doubly pleased . . . by his employer's confidence, and

by the elimination of the obnoxious Herr Tverholm under circumstances making his return unthinkable. A wild plan flashed through his head, and under the stimulation of that moment of triumph, direct and indirect, he blurted it out before he had taken time to consider all the consequences involved.

"Why don't you let me go in place of Herr Tverholm," he suggested.

"You," cried the tall man on the other side of the desk, regarding Keith with an air of utter bewilderment that gradually softened into a gently ironical smile.

It was a challenge to everything Keith had of pride and self-confidence.

"I know I can't fill Herr Tverholm's place," he said eagerly. "But I can prevent our customers from thinking that the firm has gone out of business."

There was a long pause during which Herr Brockhaus surveyed Keith intently and with increasing seriousness.

"How old are you," he asked at last.

"I shall be nineteen this autumn," Keith replied, blushing in guilty consciousness of his boyish looks, which made him seem at least two years younger no matter how he dressed or arranged his big mop of light hair. Of beard he had not yet developed anything but the faintest down on upper lip and chin.

"And you think you could do it," Herr Brockhaus queried in a tone that almost carried the suggestion of a plea.

"I'm sure I could," Keith asserted, "if you don't expect too much of me. I know that I am no good as a salesman, but I think I know the stock better than

Herr Tverholm, and I know our customers by name at least."

"Say, Wellander," Herr Brockhaus remarked warmly, his doubts dispelled at last, "it's the only possible solution, and you are doing me a service I shall not easily forget."

It was the first time Herr Brockhaus had addressed Keith by his family name, and it was like a graduation. For the moment everything else seemed comparatively insignificant.

"If you don't mind," he said, grown suddenly bold, "I'll run home and tell my parents about it, for I ought to start tomorrow if I am to get any good out of the rest of this week."

"Run along," said Herr Brockhaus, smiling faintly again, "and take all the time you need to get ready."

It was proud news Keith carried home that day, but when at last he found himself in bed ready for sleep that night, the full extent of his rashness came home to him with overwhelming effect. Of all the silly things he had done, this was the silliest, he felt. He knew that he would nearly die from shame and embarrassment every time he was about to call on a customer. Yet it did not occur to him that he might back out of his agreement.

Days afterwards, when he was far from Stockholm, he realized in a flash that, in the excitement of the occasion, he had lost his best chance of making Herr Brockhaus acquainted with the deficit that remained as a memento of Herr Tverholm's connection with the office and with Keith.

XXI

IT was an incredible episode . . . an interlude that bore very little relation to Keith's life before and after. Merely to go to a hotel and order a room took all the self-control he possessed. To take out the samples in order to make a round of their customers in the city where he happened to be was a veritable purgatory. But the real inferno was not reached until he opened a shop door and saw before him a customer to whom he must convey his identity and business in a manner apt to bring a respectful hearing.

Most of the time his efforts at salesmanship were quite perfunctory. When he had asked whether Herr So-and-so needed anything for the coming season, and Herr So-and-so had replied crossly that times were bad, business worse, and Herr Brockhaus' way of serving his customers worst of all, Keith's courage had generally slumped to the point where flight alone could save him from immediate collapse.

They were not more unkind or unapproachable than ordinary human beings are, but the youthfulness and bashfulness of their visitor made them feel their superiority of age and position rather keenly, and to get full value out of this morsel to their vanity, they had to make Keith understand how little he and his firm and his line of samples meant to them. Sometimes their initial refusal to be bothered by him was followed by a stream of criticism that Keith vainly tried to check by polite contradiction of palpable misstate-

ments. There was always enough of truth in their complaints to rob his mild arguments of any convincing force, and the final outcome was almost invariably that he fled in a state of excruciating dismay and humiliation without even having had a chance to unpack his little bag of samples. Here and there he met with better success, and mercurially his hopes rose, but only to be dashed to the ground again at the next place.

But when he was through with the painful performance of his duty . . . when he felt quite sure that the last shop had closed for the day . . . then he would breathe more easily. Returning to the hotel to eat his dinner quietly and leisurely while sipping at some newly acquired work of modern literature, he felt almost happy. All expenses were curtailed in order to enable him to get a few more tempting books, and when he reached Stockholm again, these additions to his library weighed a good deal more than his stock of samples.

Travelling by easy stages as far south as the city of Kalmar and then northward again by another route, he did a good deal of sight-seeing, too, and enjoyed it. This was his first extensive view of his own country, and the impressions he received were deeper than he realized at the time. The mighty remains of the ancient castle of Borgholm, on the island of Öland, to which he made a Sunday excursion from Kalmar, caught his fancy, generally more responsive to ideas than to things, and filled him with long forgotten schoolboy dreams of the days when poor little Sweden made war on half the civilized world and held its own for a time. While those dreams were still alive in

his mind, he started a poem . . . a real poem, having nothing to do with anybody's birthday or nameday or anniversary of one kind or another. He did not finish it . . . the rhymes came frightfully hard, and he didn't quite know what he wanted to say . . . but the effort left behind a sense of dormant possibilities . . . and it set him thinking of Lisa, to whom he wrote a letter containing more sentimentality than he had ever dared to display in her presence.

Passing by steamer along a part of the canal that runs right across the country from one coast to another, he fell into conversation with a woman still young, although many years his senior, and evidently unescorted. Thawed by her skilful flatteries, his reserve gradually melted away, and they became quite chummy as the day wore along. A pale twilight bathed the peacefully smiling landscape, through which they seemed to be floating magically, when they approached the little city of Söderköping and Keith expressed his regrets at having to lose such charming companionship.

"Oh, no," the lady replied quickly. "I am getting off here too. This unbroken travelling is more than I can stand . . . I shall stop at the hotel here over night for a rest . . ."

"That's fine," cried Keith. "Then we can have dinner together."

"So we can," she admitted with a somewhat mysterious smile.

When they reached the hotel, she urged Keith to run ahead and make sure of rooms, which he did according to his lights and, as he thought, with great success. The best of the few rooms available was as-

signed to the lady, he triumphantly told her when she appeared, and he had accepted a much poorer room on another floor. She thanked him a little coldly, he thought.

"Then we meet in the diningroom later," he went on confidently nevertheless.

"I am sorry," she rejoined, "but I am too tired. I shall have a little something sent up to my room."

That was the last he saw of her. When he came down for breakfast next morning, he learned that she had left with an early morning train, saying that she had had enough of those awfully slow boats. Keith was puzzled. Suddenly he recalled the story once told him by Herr Tverholm about an encounter with a woman on the train. Could it be possible . . . Keith blushed at the mere thought of it . . . but it was a thought that left a strange uneasiness behind.

It was with a mixed sense of relief and regret that he reached Stockholm again after an absence of seven weeks. He had been his own master and had always had money at his disposal to get what he wanted in the way of food or delicacies or books. The work connected with the trip had proved more repulsive than he had feared in advance, but he thought less of that now when it was over. Coming home meant after all stepping down from a position that had its distinct compensations.

His employer greeted him kindly, but a little sarcastically.

"You have set a double record, Wellander," he said with a twinkle in his eye. "You have spent less and sold less than any other salesman I have ever

heard of. But I am glad you made the tour all the same."

In spite of his friendly tone, the words carried a sting that depressed Keith for a moment. But soon he recovered.

"I don't care," he said to himself as he left the office for home, where his mother was celebrating his return by having one of his favourite dishes, meat balls and brown beans, for dinner. "I don't want to sell things. I don't want to say things I know not to be true. I'd rather starve . . . or do anything!"

XXII

THE tour had done Keith good. It was nice to be back in the office again, with its routine that required few decisions and no initiative. His books had recovered some of the novelty that once made them so enticing. His studies were resumed with new zest and he revelled in the discussions of the League of Youth, which, he now noticed, cultivated a technique almost antipodal to that of a travelling salesman.

But a change had come over the spirit of those discussions nevertheless. While nominally devoted to abstrusely philosophical questions, they showed a growing tendency to slide into practical and personal topics . . . which in the end always meant sex in its various social and individual, moral and biological aspects. The main sessions broke up a little earlier, and the go-as-you-please continuations gained accordingly

in length and emphasis. Little blind Klotz, with his sophistries and his simple wisdom of life, fell into the background, while Lützow, the biological and medical expert, became the acknowledged leader of the little group.

Lützow seemed more like a saint than any other person Keith had ever met. He had an air of belonging to another world, and yet he was thoroughly and lovably human in every respect. Although by far the best read and most gifted member of the group, he was the least dogmatic, the least self-assertive. He had a passion and a gift for the sympathetic understanding of every human being brought across his path by life, but he combined it with a keen, clear judgment that was peculiarly free from any sort of sentimentality.

His mother was a widow earning her own living and struggling hard to give her son an education worthy of his gifts. He, on the other hand, was no less anxious to remove the burden from her shoulders, and as a mere schoolboy he had begun to earn money by tutoring. Now he was supporting himself entirely by lecturing and laboratory work at the Carolinian Institute, where he studied. He had an enormous capacity for work, and like all great workers, he could always find time for occupations not related to his professional studies or his bread-and-butter pursuits. Music and modern literature were his main hobbies, and in both he was remarkably proficient. After one of their sessions over organic chemistry, he might swerve into a detailed analysis of some work like Ibsen's "Brand" that made Keith's eyes bulge with excited interest. And it was through him that Keith

became acquainted with the music of Wagner, to which he took from the first with a passionate sense of having found his own.

Everybody loved and respected Lützow. He was welcome everywhere, and one of his chief holds on the Leaguers was the preference he showed for their humble company. Once he said that it was the one place where he dared to express an advanced scientific idea without first putting fig leaves on it. Those ideas . . . the modern ideas of life as a growing, groping, experimental striving toward perfection . . . had become an integral part of his nature. They were his religion. It was another reason why Keith would have given anything to become really intimate with him. Lützow in no way repulsed him, but he simply did not have time enough to spare, and Keith was apt to demand all or nothing in his friendships that flared up and died out again with equal suddenness.

It was partly Keith and partly Lützow who must be held responsible for their increasing preoccupation with matters of sex, though it was easy to see that the rest of the Leaguers needed small encouragement to turn their attention in that direction. Different as they were in so many ways, here was one set of problems which none of them could escape and which affected all of them in pretty much the same fashion.

They were camping in one of their favourite haunts after the regular meeting one night, the usual supply of beer and sandwiches having been brought in, when little Klotz suddenly spoke up:

"Lützow, I can't see you, but I know that something is the matter with you."

As Klotz spoke, everybody realized that Lützow

had been singularly silent and apparently depressed all that evening. Now he fixed his eye-glasses more firmly with a little gesture that generally preceded any carefully weighed utterance on his part.

"I had a peculiar experience last night," he began abruptly, "and it has been on my mind ever since. I was going home late . . . alone. On Government Street I noticed a young woman walking a little ahead of me. She, too, was alone, and the manner in which she slowed up indicated that she wished me to overtake her. I took her for the common kind, of course, and hurried on a little to get by her and be done with it. I was not in a mood for that kind of thing. Yet I was curious, I suppose. . . . Anyhow, I turned to look at her as I was about to pass her. . . . One look was enough to show that she could not be what I had thought her. . . . She must have been about thirty, quite good-looking, refined, well dressed, but her face. . . . I can't find words for it. . . . There was a look on it that almost frightened me. I felt as if I had been guilty of a crime in staring at her as I had done, and I was going to mutter some sort of apology when she spoke to me. Her voice was like her face . . . a sort of frozen sob. And do you know what she said to me . . . ? 'Please can I go home with you?' It almost knocked me off my feet, but what called me back to my senses, I think, was that voice of hers . . . Well, we walked up and down that street talking until nearly four in the morning. By that time she had calmed down and was herself again so that I could take her to the little hotel where she was stopping. She was as decent and respectable as any one of us here, and yet. . . . What in thunder

is this thing in us that can make a perfectly good woman act like that?"

"How do you know she was good . . . or that she is," Krook asked when Lützow stopped. "I have my doubts."

"I have not," Lützow retorted with a for him quite uncommon brusqueness. "Of course, we can never be quite sure of knowing anything at all in such matters. And yet we can form pretty reliable conclusions. . . . Her personality told her story. . . . And she told it in plain words after a while. . . . It is easy to tell a story of course, but I think she told the truth. . . . She is a governess with an excellent position and good personal connections . . . unusually well informed for a woman . . . with a very clear head. She is well satisfied with her life most of the time, but every third or fourth month she is seized by a fit of desire that brings her to the verge of insanity . . . She told me that this time it had become too much for her. . . . Without a word to anybody, she had packed a handbag and started for Stockholm on the little steamer which makes daily trips past the estate of her employers. She had no plans . . . didn't know what to do . . . and she had practically spent the whole day walking up and down the streets. Her exhaustion helped me probably as much as anything else to bring her to herself. She told me before I left her that the attack was over, and that she would probably be spared another for several months . . . God, but I pitied her . . . and I was glad as never before to be a man . . . for after all. . . ."

"Do you think so," Held broke in. "I think it only a question of another kind of hell."

"But, Lützow," Keith said slowly, "would it not have been kinder. . . ."

"To take her home," Lützow filled in with a slight twinkle in his eyes . . . the first sign of a return to normal spirits. "Well, the simplest answer would be that I live with my mother. But apart from that . . . how could I have taken advantage of the state she was in? Personally, I believe that we don't gain anything, and don't show any particular virtue, by resisting our impulses too much . . . that we have a right, if not a duty, to satisfy them . . . that women have the same rights as men in these matters . . . but it must be done fairly and squarely. Both sides to it must know what they are doing, and . . . what would have been the feelings of that woman when she woke up the next morning . . . in her normal mind . . . if I had done what you suggest?"

"Yes, that's just the question," Krook replied ambiguously on behalf of Keith.

"I guess you did right . . . from your own point of view," Keith mused. "But from hers. . . . I really don't know."

He was thinking of Herr Tverholm's story and of his own experience at the hotel in Söderköping.

"You asked what it is," said Klotz to Lützow." "Of course, I should like to know. . . . But what concerns me more is what to do with it. . . ."

"You, too," cried Held irreverently.

"Oh, Klotz is the very devil on women," Swensson put in dryly.

"I have my weaknesses," rejoined Klotz, smiling the peculiar empty smile of the blind, "and I get my little favours. But . . . but . . . it's such a frightful

waste of time to look for them . . . and I wish I could use my time and my energy for better purposes. . . ."

The atmosphere had grown tense. The talk died out. Everybody seemed pensive. Soon they broke up.

Keith walked home alone, feeling both disturbed and relieved. For it was a relief to know that those men, even Klotz and Lützow, had to struggle with problems like his own, and that they were as helpless as he. Then his mind began to circle about the story told by Lützow, but only to return to himself in the end.

"Yes," he repeated after Klotz, "what *can* you do about it?"

XXIII

HIS visits to the Walters had become more frequent again, and some of the embarrassment that used to trouble his relations to Lisa had returned. She, too, seemed to be watching him in a new manner, and she often blushed and interrupted herself when talking to him. That letter he wrote on his journey must be the cause of it, Keith thought.

At the same time everybody around him had become strangely interested in telling him about Lisa's deep and undying affection for some one else . . . her cousin Tor, or his handsome sailor brother, or some nameless young man who might turn up at any moment. Fru Walter talked one moment about the impossibility of marrying without a sufficiently large and

secure income, and in the next about the folly of paying any attention whatsoever to young people's dreams about what they called love. Such love, she said, existed only in books, and its most characteristic feature was that one neither lived nor died by it.

The effect on Keith was easily predictable. In one week he had persuaded himself that he could not live without Lisa, and in another he had told her so.

He didn't ask her to marry him. Marriage did not figure in his mind at all. Nor did he ask favours of any kind. He did not even try to kiss her. He merely conveyed the idea of his undying love to her, and his hope that she would requite his feelings.

Whether she did or not, he could not tell, and this uncertainty seemed to make the game they were playing ever so much more exciting.

She didn't silence him when he talked in a roundabout way about his love. At times she hinted that her heart already was burnt out so that she could never hope to love again. When she talked that way, her tone generally took on a tenseness it had not had before.

In the midst of this excitement Lisa announced unexpectedly that she was going to work in an office not far from her home. There they had a telephone, and one had recently been installed in the office of Herr Brockhaus. Soon Keith was having long talks over the wire with Lisa, and in that way he could get much closer to her than when they were together. The game of hide and seek was on, and both were enjoying it greatly.

One day he learned that she would have to stay on duty until quite late that evening, and with some diffi-

culty he obtained permission to meet her and escort her home. They found the street door open and the stairs dark, when they reached her house. Keith had to see Lisa safely to her own door on the third floor.

Halfway up the stairs, they stopped as if by agreement, hand in hand. . . . A moment later their lips met. . . . It was over before Keith had realized what he was doing . . . or she . . . for he could not tell who took the initiative in that kiss . . . the second and last one. . . .

On his way home later, he felt very happy, but still more restless and disturbed. This strange state of mind on such an occasion he ascribed to the fact that, even then, Lisa had not been willing to admit outright that she loved him.

XXIV

HE was going home from the Walters' again a few nights later. Walking along one side of the little square near which they lived, he noticed a young woman.

She smiled at him. He stopped without exactly knowing why.

She was simply dressed, but in excellent taste. She was pretty too. Her eyes and smile were particularly sweet.

"Can I go with you," Keith asked with unwonted forwardness, forgetful for the moment of the attraction just left behind, but meaning nothing in particular by his request.

"Not tonight," the girl answered readily. "I am

waiting for a friend. But some other time. Come and see me."

Keith opened his eyes widely.

"Where," he asked, "and when?"

"Tomorrow afternoon," she suggested and gave him an address not very far from the office. "The people I live with are named Eriksson. Ask for Karin."

They parted with another smile.

Keith was not yet sure that he had understood her properly, but he decided to call at the time and place indicated.

Next afternoon he found an excuse for leaving the office. He knocked at a door on the third floor of an old house on Merchant Street. A small, neat-looking, elderly woman appeared.

"Is Karin at home?" Keith asked.

"Step right in," said the old woman pleasantly, pointing to an inner door. "She's in there."

After another knock and a bright "come in" from Karin, he found himself in a large room absolutely devoid of furniture except for a single kitchen chair in a corner.

"I am sorry," Karin laughed, noticing his look of disappointment. "But I have just moved in, and my own furniture has not come yet."

"That settles it, I suppose," Keith remarked gloomily. "I must not disturb you. . . ."

"Nonsense," she rejoined with mischievously gleaming eyes. "We have a chair to sit on, as you see. . . ."

Two days later he returned about the same time. A long pause followed his knock. Finally the door

was opened about an inch, and the little old woman showed one suspicious eye through the crack.

"What do you want," she demanded.

"I want to see Karin," Keith declared with a sinking heart.

The old woman merely shook her head.

"Has she moved," Keith asked incredulously.

The door opened another inch.

"You were here the other day," the old woman said.

Keith nodded.

"Well, Karin is gone, and I don't think it's much use looking for her."

"But where," Keith persisted. "And why . . . she had just moved in?"

The door opened a little more.

"Come in," the old woman whispered. "You look as if you might be trusted."

Keith stepped inside, and the door closed cautiously behind him.

"The police took her last night," the old woman explained, still in an undertone.

"The police," Keith repeated uncomprehendingly. "Had she done anything?"

"Not a thing," the woman shook her head sadly. "And she was such a nice girl."

"But where is she?"

"In the workhouse . . . for three whole months."

"In the workhouse. . . ." Keith still failed to comprehend. "What is she doing there?"

"Picking hemp, of course, like all the rest," the little old woman replied. "It's a shame, I think . . . she had such nice white hands."

There was nothing to do about it. Keith returned to the office in a daze. He would like to make inquiries, but dared not. Gradually, by careful questioning, he learned from Engstrand why women were suddenly sent to the workhouse.

It made him unhappy for several days. He had taken a great liking to Karin.

But in the meantime he kept on visiting the Walters as usual.

XXV

AFTER the incident with Karin his state of mind grew more inexplicable every day.

One morning he found Mathilda still at work in the office when he arrived. It was no uncommon thing. He saw her two or three times a week and never paid any attention to her except by teasing her a little about her religion now and then.

She was not bad-looking, but her sparse hair drawn back tightly over her head, her rather inexpressive and colourless eyes, and her thin, tightly closed lips did not invite to liberties.

This morning Keith noticed Mathilda with customary indifference. She looked and behaved as she always did, going about her business silently as if he did not exist.

Afterward he had a vague idea of having said something to her, but no definite impression of it remained in his mind.

It was as if, all of a sudden, the air had become filled with flaming gases. The flames blinded him

and filled his ears with a roar as of big carts rumbling along the street. They were in his blood, too. . . . The room was gone. . . . The world was a chaos in which he struggled frantically. . . .

It may have lasted for hours, or a few seconds only. . . . Keith could not tell.

When he came to himself, he was in the inner room. His arm was around Mathilda's waist. Her face, white and furious, was close to his own, which smarted as from a newly received blow.

His eyes met hers, and there he read a scorn more burning than the flames that had scorched him a moment before. Neither one of them said a word.

A sense of utter exhaustion overcame him. For a moment he seemed to cling to Mathilda in order not to fall.

Then he became unbearably aware of having made himself ridiculous. His right arm slipped away from Mathilda and dropped limply by his side. Still he could not leave.

Mathilda shook herself a little. Her hair was slightly rumpled, which became her much better, Keith noticed. Otherwise she looked none the worse for the struggle out of which she had just emerged victorious. Without a word she set about her business again as if nothing had happened and as if Keith were not there.

He returned slowly to his desk, still too stunned to realize clearly what had happened. Full awakening came only when Mathilda was about to leave and turned back in the doorway to remark acidly:

"Now he knows better than to try any nonsense with me, I hope. But I am going to speak to Herr

Brockhaus all the same, because I don't want to be bothered in this way."

Keith's humiliation turned into fright as she slammed the door behind her. He felt sure of being discharged, and began to wonder what reason he could give for it at home.

Nothing happened until late in the afternoon of the following day, when Herr Brockhaus looked up from his correspondence with a queer expression in his eyes. He seemed to speak with some difficulty.

"Mathilda told me," he said, the corners of his mouth twitching suspiciously. "Really, Wellander, I think you are wasting your time. . . ."

Then he grew serious as he added: "She is a darned fine girl, although nothing but a laundress, and I want you to leave her alone."

"I only tried to kiss her," Keith ventured, hardly knowing whether to speak or keep silent.

Herr Brockhaus turned abruptly to look for something in the safe. Keith noticed his shoulders moving curiously, almost as if he were laughing. It was worse than being threatened with dismissal.

At the same time, however . . . a new aspect presented itself to Keith . . . the mere fact that Herr Brockhaus seemed more amused than offended . . . and the suggestion of a secret mutual understanding carried by his voice and words . . . as between two men. . . .

That was it, Keith felt . . . all men were at one in matters concerning women . . . although their ways might differ, as in the case of Lützow. . . .

XXVI

LISA was sitting by the window of the large livingroom in her mother's home on a Sunday afternoon. The rest of the family happened to be away when Keith dropped in. She had been reading a volume he had brought her . . . Björnson's "A Gauntlet."

"Did you like it?" he asked eagerly.

"Yes," she answered hesitatingly.

"I think it is fine," Keith went on. "I have always thought it outrageous to demand one kind of behaviour of men and another of women. I think women should have the same freedom as men. . . ."

"That's not what Björnson says," Lisa interrupted him. "He thinks men should be subject to the same restrictions as women."

"True," Keith admitted a little less enthusiastically. "He is rather old-fashioned in certain ways. But I think his play should not be interpreted too narrowly."

Lisa was looking at him in a curious way.

"Tell me," she whispered at last, "about yourself. . . ."

There was a long pause during which Keith thought of many things quite unrelated to the question just asked of him.

"Well," he said at last a little sadly, but also a little proudly, "I wish I could answer you as I think you want me to . . . but I cannot. I am no better

than other men . . . and no worse. It's nature . . . it can't be helped. . . ."

Quickly he bent down over her.

"Why, Lisa!" he gasped. "Are you crying. . . . Do you really care so much? . . ."

"I suppose you are right," she managed to say. "But it hurts. . . . I thought you were so fine. . . ."

Then her mother and sister were heard in the hall outside. They had no more chance to talk privately that day. Nor did Lisa appear to desire any such opportunity.

She never referred to that brief talk of theirs. For a while their relationship seemed to have suffered no harm. Yet things were no longer as they had been. Gradually their intimacy decreased, while outwardly they remained as friendly as ever. It was not Lisa alone that determined this change. Keith was as much responsible for it as she. It was as if, unconsciously, he resented some tacit demand implied in her attitude toward him.

He continued to come and go in the Walter home almost as a member of the family, but more and more frequently his first remark on arriving was an apology for having stayed away so long. All at once so many other things seemed to make demands on his time. He was seeing a good deal of Engstrand and other young men of his own profession, with whom he spent two or three evenings a week playing *vira* . . . a game of the auction bridge variety, but much more complicated. Keith had completely fallen under the spell of it. Even his allegiance to the League of Youth suffered from this new interest.

"Are you never going to the Walters any more,"

his mother asked him as he was starting for Engstrand's little bachelor den one evening.

"Why, yes," Keith replied as if surprised by her question. "I was there. . . ." He had to stop and think. "I am sure I was there the week before last. . . ."

"The week before last," she repeated with a smile. "And what does Lisa say?"

"Oh, Lisa," Keith rejoined in a tone that could have been no more inexplicable to his mother than it was to himself. "I don't know . . . she wants. . . . I guess she's looking for a saint . . . or a sissy!"

"And you are neither?"

"Certainly not a sissy," Keith laughed. "Don't worry about me now . . . I may not be home before midnight."

On his way to Engstrand's place Keith fell to thinking. It was funny how easily he and Lisa had drifted apart . . . and how little he had resisted. Probably he had never cared for her as he thought he did. . . .

Even as he said so to himself, he became aware of a sharp pang. The old sense of loneliness gripped him. He was alone, indeed. What did those card-players matter to him? Lisa had given him something after all . . . something that his nature seemed to crave imperatively. And now she was lost . . . gone out of his life for ever. . . .

His first love . . . a pale and shadowy affair, but still his first real love . . . that had nothing in common with adventures on Merchant Street!

PART THREE

I

IT was as if the break with Lisa . . . which, characteristically, was never a break at all, but a mere drifting apart, unprotestingly accepted by both as inevitable . . . had been the signal, as it was the symbol, of a change in the entire tenor of Keith's existence.

Small as had been the part she played in his life from an outside point of view . . . slender as had been the thread of sentiment binding them to each other . . . silly as might seem the fleshless dream beyond all time and space where she had reigned in pale, unreal splendour . . . yet her going out of his life meant the clouding of a star by which the helmsman of his soul had steered a fairly steady course.

The quiet, profitable days of uneventful journeying were over. He was adrift. He felt that things must happen, or he would go mad . . . not only things within himself, but visible to all the world. And, of course, he was provided with the food his fate demanded.

The farewell that he never said to Lisa was also a farewell to those challenging realms of the spirit where she had never cared or been able to accompany him. It meant a farewell to ideals, too . . . ideals that were not dead, but sleeping and forgotten. It was a loss that seemed irreparable . . . and yet a

gain, because it speeded him on the storm-tossed course he had to travel on his way to new ideals that meant, perhaps, a resurrection of the old.

II

"WELLANDER," said Herr Brockhaus one day, "I am going to have a partner. You know Herr Kjellin? Everything is settled, and I hope you will work as well for him as you have worked for me."

That afternoon Herr Kjellin himself came into the office and shook hands with Keith, expressing at the same time all sorts of good wishes for their future relationship. Keith felt flattered, excited and, consequently, quite happy for the time being.

He wondered, of course, if it would mean any change in his own position, but he felt no particular apprehension of this kind. Gradually he had come to seem indispensable in spite of all minor derelictions. On the whole, he was more familiar with the routine of the business than any one else . . . which meant Herr Brockhaus. New duties had fallen on his shoulders by degrees, and as no sharp line was drawn around his responsibilities, he had a hand in practically every phase of the work. Part of the bookkeeping was done by him, although he had never received any systematic instruction in the keeping of books. The daily cash book in particular was entrusted to him, as was the cash itself, so that he sometimes told himself in strict confidence that his title ought to be that of cashier. He took part in the domestic cor-

correspondence besides, and he continued to do most of the filling and packing of orders received, as well as of the unpacking and placing of new supplies. The truth was that he worked hard much of the time, but never with his whole mind, and the part of it that remained unoccupied made more fuss than all the rest of him . . . perhaps because it was the most typical and essential part of his own self.

A new salesman had been engaged . . . an elderly, fattish, kindly man who proved astonishingly to be the father of Knut Held in the League of Youth, although his name was Martin Ericsson. From the first Keith liked him and disregarded him, as he was a good sort, very fond of *vira,* but whining even more than the departed Herr Tverholm about expenses and service without possessing the latter's capacity for getting orders in spite of everything.

Herr Tverholm's going, by the bye, had stopped the artificial leakage from the petty cash account, much to Keith's joy, but the deficit remained. It had become an institution like the account itself, and Keith never worried about it except in moments of unusual depression. He could pay it whenever called on to do so, he felt, as his yearly salary now amounted to nine hundred *kronor* and was to be raised to an even thousand in honour of the partnership. The strange thing is that he didn't pay and be done with it, but the idea never occurred to him . . . probably because some idiotic sense of logic forbade him to take a responsibility incurred, as it seemed, by Herr Tverholm rather than by himself.

Soon Herr Kjellin was installed at a very ornate desk of his own choosing. And in a few days Keith

discovered that it made no difference as far as his work was concerned. Just what had led to the partnership he did not learn, but he had good reason to suspect that the financial position of Herr Brockhaus had been even worse than the perennial scarcity of cash indicated. Herr Kjellin brought fresh capital, and Keith gathered that the whole business was to be placed on a more pretentious basis.

New quarters were rented in a more modern building further up the same street, and the removal took place at once. There they occupied a whole floor with six large rooms. Vast stretches of new shelving were put into some of those rooms, and for a while Keith's most exacting problem was to arrange the stock so that it did not appear completely lost on those enormous expanses of fresh-smelling pine boards. A man was hired to do the heavier work connected with the packing and unpacking . . . a curly-haired and clumsy young Dalecarlian named Per, who promptly fell into special vassalage to Keith. The climax came with the employment of a new volunteer to assist Keith on the clerical side. It was all very grand and very stimulating for a while.

But when they had shaken down in their new quarters, Keith noticed that he had to spend as much time and attention on Per and the volunteer as on the duties remaining exclusively his own. The routine was the same as ever. Day after day, season after season, he went through the same all too familiar round of tasks, none of which seemed to him to possess any fundamental significance whatever.

In spite of the years and the experience added to him, his attitude toward business had not changed.

It was a silly game, carried on out of inescapable necessity, and no sensible person could possibly view it with anything but impatience. To derive from it a life-sustaining interest seemed so completely out of the question that the idea never entered Keith's head.

His existence at the office had to be suffered more or less gladly or crossly. His real life began on leaving it, and as the office took twelve of his waking hours every weekday, it is not to be wondered that he hungered for a change . . . any change.

III

THE poison long dormant in Keith's system had become active at last. He was writing poetry . . . or trying to . . . real poetry such as you find in books, and ultra modern at that.

That first effusion in honour of Lisa's grandmother had been followed by many others of the same kind . . . as amateurish as they were ephemeral. Among his friends he was regarded with something like awe on this account, and Lisa had not been the only one to declare him a real poet.

But Keith knew better. His lack of sophistication did not extend to anything having to do with the intellect . . . and his attempts at poetic expression were the results of sheer head-work, laboriously pieced together, with the rhymes chosen from lists carefully made out in advance, and each foot of the painfully correct metre checked off by a tap of his finger. He dreaded the work, but he could not keep away from it. There was a fatal lure about it that affected him

in much the same way as the irksome stirrings of his sex impulse.

Ever since that first flight into pure poetry prompted by his visit to the ruins of Borgholm, he had played with the idea of verse without occasional origins. But nothing would come when he tried. In this as in many other matters, his parting from Lisa seemed to work a radical change.

He began to read poetry, which until then he had largely eschewed. Carl Snoilsky and Viktor Rydberg he found too classical, both in spirit and in form. A volume of verse by Strindberg gave him the model he wanted. He set to work bravely, taking his themes preferably from life's off-side and reducing rhyme to a minimum. It bothered him thus to ring the changes on certain groups of consonants and vowels, but free verse in the more recent sense had not yet been discovered.

His manuscripts were carried back and forth between the home and the office. At night he pored over them hopelessly or hopefully whenever he was not engaged in a game of *vira* somewhere. During the day never less than one draft rested securely under the big blotter on his desk until a much coveted hour of solitude would permit him to turn from Mercury to the Muses.

It was agonizing work, and slow. Sometimes he produced a whole poem in two or three days. More often it took him a week. They were sad specimens of Naturalism at its worst . . . verbal photographies all grey and black and dirty brown in colour. His favourite poem was a description of a prostitute strolling with pretended arrogance along the lamplit

street, her soul and her stomach equally troubled by their emptiness . . . strolling along "on run-over heels." He loved that phrase . . . "on run-over heels" . . . he tasted it as one tastes a palatable morsel of food, and he felt sure that it proved his unmistakeable kinship to the new spirit stirring so militantly in life and in letters.

When he had finished about two scores of such efforts, he began to think of what to do with them. He had read some of them to friends from time to time and had always been told that they were "nice." But the tone in which that modest measure of praise was bestowed convinced him that each particular appraiser neither cared for nor understood true poetry . . . or at least not true poetry of the new type. It was disappointing, but not unexpected. To send his poems to an editor of some kind had never occurred to him . . . in fact, it is not quite certain that he had yet come to realize the existence of such people as editors. Periodicals and papers just appeared, more or less mysteriously, much as children did. There was, of course, a perfectly natural explanation in both cases, and Keith had discovered it as far as the children were concerned, but in regard to publications of any kind he was still in the dark.

In this dilemma he bethought himself of the possibility of turning to some noted author for advice. This form of appeal seems to come as naturally to incipient writers as scratching for worms comes to chickens. He had heard a great deal of Gustaf af Geijerstam . . . almost as much as of Strindberg himself. Geijerstam was the real head of the amorphous literary group named or nicknamed "Young

Sweden." Geijerstam had written a highly realistic and autobiographically coloured work, "Erik Grane," which Keith had read and liked very much, especially because of the scene between the hero and a woman like the one described in Keith's favourite poem. To Geijerstam he might turn . . . and so he did . . . writing for permission to see him . . . obtaining it miraculously . . . and finally calling in person with his manuscript neatly rolled and symbolically tied up with a black ribbon.

The great man proved to be small of stature, with a tendency to obesity and baldness. His eyes were sometimes hidden and sometimes abnormally emphasized by strongly magnifying glasses. His movements were restless. His speech was not ungracious, but suggestive of the preciousness of his time. A sweet-looking young woman had disappeared from the room with a quick, kind smile at the visitor as Keith entered. Signs of domesticity mingled strangely with the markedly literary atmosphere of the room. Keith was puzzled, but nevertheless impressed. . . .

"Why don't you write prose," Geijerstam asked brusquely after having learned his visitor's errand.

"I can't," Keith answered surprised.

"Nonsense," his host retorted, moving around his overcrowded writing-desk like a hungry beast of prey, while at the same time reassuring the nervous, light-haired youth on the sofa with a gentle smile. "Anybody can. Have you tried?"

"N-no," Keith hesitated. "But I know . . . it does not come natural to me."

"Do try," Geijerstam urged as if his own welfare

and that of his visitor equally depended on it. "Poetry is old-fashioned . . . we are done with it. What the new literature needs is the freer, richer, subtler medium of prose. It's the natural medium of youth . . . do try it!"

"I will," Keith promised.

"All right," said Geijerstam, beaming at him through those disturbing glasses. "I'll look over your manuscript and let you know."

A couple of unendurable weeks followed. One day, however, Keith received a curt note asking him to call again. That settled it. Why should he be asked to go there if the great man had not found his work promising? His feelings are not to be described . . . and it is kinder to drop a veil over his anticipatory enjoyment of a great poet's name and fame.

When he did call, Herr Geijerstam was out. But the young lady with the kind smile was there and handed him the roll of manuscript still neatly and symbolically tied with that black ribbon. Her husband regretted having been called away suddenly, but he had written all he had to say on the outside of the manuscript.

Keith tried to resist, but could not. His eyes were magnetically drawn to the roll of paper in his hand. A few words were scrawled on it. He caught them in a flash:

"Burn these and write new ones, or don't write at all."

"Thank you," he said, looking up at the young woman who was watching him with eyes that seemed curiously moist.

"I am so sorry," she said almost in a whisper.

"Thank you," Keith repeated as he turned and walked down the stairs.

He would write new ones, of course . . . and add them to those so scornfully rejected . . . and . . . whatever else he did, he would never write prose. It seemed to cast a blight on the appreciation of true poetry.

IV

"NO, I don't want to be a business man," he caught himself saying aloud one day when he was alone in the office, both the volunteer and Per being occupied elsewhere and the partners having failed to show up, as was so often the case.

It started him on a train of thought that he had followed many times lately. . . .

It was hardly enough to say that he did not want to be a business man. The full truth was that he did not want to have anything at all to do with business . . . that he was so utterly tired of the mere thought of it that nothing but habit and fear could explain his failure to break away from it that very day.

What did it mean to him . . . in present and future terms?

Nothing but a lifetime of the kind of thing he was now doing. He might change to another firm, to another kind of business, but what difference would that make? The work would always remain essentially the same . . . a form of drudgery to which his mind

stubbornly refused to rise after it had once been mastered.

Without capital, without connections, without the ardour that can win both, it was vain for him to harbour any hopes of ever having a business of his own. He would have to remain a mere clerk, and if he kept at it long enough, he might achieve twenty-four hundred a year, or perhaps even three thousand . . . which was about what his father had when all his various "emoluments" were counted in. He knew what that meant . . . and it was not for him.

This was not the main thing, however. To him the principal consideration in life was interest . . . something inside or outside himself that oriented and concentrated all his faculties and energies so that they operated automatically, in absolute harmony, without speculation or hesitation, without friction or resistance. If he had such an interest, he could move mountains. If he lacked it, he could do nothing but grope and mope and curse and whine as he was doing now.

As once before, during the time when he was preparing for his first communion . . . which seemed ages ago . . . he began to examine himself in order to discover what it was he wanted to do . . . if there was anything he wanted to do so badly that for its sake he could risk anything, everything. . . .

And again, as then, the result was wholly negative.

He wanted to study, but he no longer craved it as ardently as had been the case a year earlier, and there was no one particular thing he wished to study. Not even literature held him as it used to. Books tempted him as they had always done, and he spent more money

on them than he could afford, but it happened with increasing frequency that a new book, acquired in a frenzy of expectation, remained unread for months, or entirely.

No, that was the worst of it . . . he did not know where to turn or what to do, because he was not aware of anything that called to him with particular force to be done.

He had more or less drifted away from everything that had held his interest during the preceding couple of years. The League of Youth had petered out. He rarely saw any of the former Leaguers. He had lost touch with Lützow, and regretted this fact more than anything else. He hardly ever went to the Positivist Society . . . partly because he had got all he could get out of that organization and partly because he generally played cards Saturday night and preferred to sleep late on Sunday morning.

Card playing . . . that was now his chief interest in life, and how much longer would that hold him? Much as he enjoyed it, he had no illusions about it. As a makeshift it might do . . . for a time . . but no more . . . and then there would be nothing . . . and he was twenty!

His mind returned to the happy days when all the world seemed renewed by his discovery of Comte and the philosophic religion of Humanity. He thought of Dr. Malmberg . . . of the queer hours spent in his home . . . of the people he had met there . . . of Björnson and his stories about Lincoln . . . of America. . . .

It struck him like a thunderbolt . . . America

. . . that was the solution . . . but no more loose talk this time . . . first learn the language and save up money . . . and then. . . .

That same day he bought a combined English grammar and reader. With this in his hand, he swore not to touch another book during his leisure hours until he could read the language easily.

For two months he kept his promise, carrying that one book with him wherever he went. At the end of that period of intense and undivided application, he got hold of "David Copperfield" in the original and found that he could understand a good deal of it . . . enough to follow the story. There was something about the figure of David that captured his heart completely . . . perhaps a real or imagined resemblance to himself. Anyhow, he went on eagerly to "Nicholas Nickleby" and "Martin Chuzzlewit." The latter tired him a little, and its pictures of American life repelled him. . . .

That was the end of Dickens and his English reading. His indispensable combined grammar and reader had dropped out of sight weeks before. But the idea of going to America still clung to him, though not without many misgivings . . . for he had, of course, failed utterly in his complementary scheme of saving up money for the trip.

One day, in sheer desperation, when he and Herr Brockhaus were alone in the office, he blurted out that he could probably only stay a few months more, and that he felt it a duty to let his employer know.

"Another job," asked Herr Brockhaus.

Keith shook his head, already somewhat embarrassed.

"You are not thinking of America again," Herr Brockhaus tried once more.

This time Keith nodded affirmatively, his embarrassment much increased.

"Nonsense," cried Herr Brockhaus. "I just won't let you. What in the world are you going to do there? And I can't spare you. Do you imagine that you will be any better off out there? What *are* you going to do? Why are you going?"

The whole story of what was stirring in his mind seemed to lie on the tip of Keith's tongue ready to leap forth, but one glance at his employer's firmly set face was enough to check him.

"I want to get out," was all he could mutter.

"So you can . . . later on," Herr Brockhaus declared with assurance. "But not just now. . . ."

Then history resorted to its old trick of repeating itself.

"I have raised your salary once before when you began to talk of America," Herr Brockhaus ruminated. "I am going to do so again . . . though I think I am a fool for doing it . . . I shall give you twelve hundred a year. . . ."

There was a pause during which Keith watched him apprehensively. Then Herr Brockhaus added: ". . . as soon as my books are balanced."

"All right," said Keith, feeling suddenly very tired. "I thank you very much . . . though I had no thought of . . . but . . . well, of course, I shall stay, as you want me so badly. . . ."

After all, it was a relief to give in. He did not

have the money to go anyhow, and he had suddenly realized that he did not want to go badly enough to fight for it.

It was a little strange that Herr Brockhaus should have set such a peculiar term for the beginning of the raise, but that was his way of doing things, and it didn't matter very much as he probably would be done with the books within a few weeks.

V

"THAT O. K. Rask meeting is tonight," Engstrand called out to Keith as they ran into each other on the street one gloomy February afternoon, when every one was wondering irritably if spring would never come. "Are you going?"

"O. K. Rask," Keith repeated. "Do you mean the Liquor King?"

"There's only one O. K. R., and he's his own prophet."

"Why should I go to his meeting? I don't like *brännvin* particularly."

"No, but you are a member of the most honourable profession of wholesale clerks, and he is going to help us form an organization which we have failed to form ourselves."

"Why should he? He's an employer."

"Oh, I suppose he thinks more *brännvin* will be consumed if we come together."

"Do you really think there is anything to it," Keith asked, still indifferent.

"Not a thing," Engstrand declared emphatically. "But there will be some fun, I bet you, and so you had better come on."

"All right," Keith assented, having nothing else to do that evening.

The idea that the wholesale clerks might need an organization was new to him and piqued him. His curiosity rose rapidly. Why should O. K. Rask be interested in such a movement . . . the owner of a group of distilleries who had made himself a millionaire by selling his products direct to the consumers in novel and sensational ways at a time when systematic control of the liquor traffic had just become a burning problem? And why should the clerks need prodding or protection from an outsider to form an organization of their own?

The Little Hall of the Bourse was crowded when Keith and Engstrand entered it, and they had to be satisfied with seats near the door. Most of those present were young men, well dressed and alert looking. The atmosphere was quiet, but a little tense. There were smiles on many faces, while others showed a set look indicative of resentment.

A chairman had already been elected, and he was introducing Herr Rask, who stepped briskly to the edge of the platform and let loose a flood of words unaccompanied by a single gesture. From where Keith sat, he looked like a preacher, and this resemblance was accentuated by the black frock coat he wore. He was suave, but insistent . . . complimentary, but patronizing. He talked glibly about co-operation, but had little or nothing to say about methods or purposes. Occupational organization was in the air,

and it seemed anomalous and regrettable that one of the most advanced bodies of men in the country should remain behind in this respect. Vague hints were dropped about funds that might prove available in case of the right kind of action, and as far as personal service was concerned, the speaker, of course, placed himself unreservedly at their disposal.

Perfunctory applause signalized the end of his address. A long pause followed. It looked as if the meeting might come to an end then and there. But the urgent requests of the chairman finally brought a timid and nervous but determined young man to his feet, and he furnished the pattern for a long series of subsequent utterances. Herr Rask was thanked and complimented. The great value and equally great need of an organization were admitted. But . . .

"I have never heard so many buts in my life," Engstrand whispered to Keith as speaker followed speaker, each one showing his feelings a little more plainly than the preceding one. Yet all the decencies and amenities were carefully preserved. The trouble was simply that Herr Rask proposed something that couldn't be done. Each speaker gave a slightly different reason for the impossibility inherent in the proposition, but all the reasons pointed to the same conclusion.

It was a wonderful display of passive resistance, leaving no doubt as to the animus seething beneath the carefully preserved outward forms. The chairman was growing more and more fidgety. Herr Rask's oily smile was becoming more and more stereotyped. To prevent an immediate and humiliating collapse of the whole project, the chairman finally sug-

gested the appointment of a committee to consider ways and means, and having power to call a new meeting when their report was ready. Everybody shouted assent and rushed for the doors.

Keith and Engstrand took it easier and stood aside watching the sarcastically gleeful faces streaming by. In all that crowd of men engaged in the same kind of work as himself, Keith reflected, there was not one whom he knew, or even recognized.

"That's the end of that," Engstrand remarked dryly when they emerged on the snow-covered Great Square again.

"Why," Keith wondered. "Don't they want an organization?"

"Yes, indeed," Engstrand rejoined. "But . . . as they all said up there . . . it can't be done."

"Why," Keith persisted. "If they do want it . . ."

"It has been tried time and again for thirty years and found impossible. The wholesale clerks are a peculiar set of men . . . independent and jealous of their position . . . and every last one of them expects to end as a *grosshandlare*."

"But they won't," Keith protested with a melancholy glance at his own situation. "And that's no reason anyhow for not coming together while they are still clerks."

"Are *you* going to convince them of their mistaken attitude," Engstrand demanded, freighting his words with an extra dose of his customary sarcasm.

"I . . ." Keith sputtered as if the suggestion had been serious. "I am too young and too little known . . . but you . . ."

"No, thank you," Engstrand remarked in his driest tone. "Life is too short."

Day after day Keith scanned the paper for news of that committee. He made personal inquiries. Engstrand proved right . . . that was the end of that.

VI

BUT the idea of an organization had become firmly lodged in Keith's mind and would not leave him in peace. That the wholesale clerks should act together in matters of common interest, and that they needed a carefully shaped instrument for such action, seemed to him so self-evident that he found it hard to reason about it. And he fumed at the failure of his colleagues to see and do the reasonable thing. At last it became almost an obsession with him. He could hardly talk of anything else.

He sought the company of his own class as he had never done before. Wherever he went, he raised the question that was uppermost in his own mind, and everywhere . . . from the most different types of men . . . he got back the same word: *impossible*.

He grew to hate that word. It was like a personal enemy challenging all there was in him of strength and skill and will. It seemed to him that nothing could really be worth doing unless it was held impossible. He recalled having read about some one who would not admit the offending word as part of his dictionary, and he felt inclined to imitate that example.

The thought of any leadership on his own part was totally foreign to him at the start . . . an idea too

preposterous to be considered. Little by little, however, it was forced upon him as an unavoidable alternative . . . the only other one being to drop the whole business as impossible . . . which, of course, was not possible.

The end of it was that Keith, after much pondering and many vacillations, called together four carefully selected colleagues and asked them to join him in a new initiative. He took great care not to propose too much at the start, but suggested merely that they should collect all the information available on the subject and then go over the ground minutely to determine for themselves, regardless of established traditions, if and how the thing could be done. They consented, forming themselves on the spot into a committee with Fritz Bartels as chairman and Keith as secretary.

It was suggested, of course, as a matter of courtesy, that Keith, who had called the meeting, should take the chairmanship, although all but Bartels himself were agreed on him as the better man for the position. It was Keith himself who settled the question once for all in favour of Bartels. He seemed a different person under the impulse of a project that had aroused his interest to a degree never before experienced. He showed a shrewdness and judgment of character that seemed to belong to some power acting through him rather than to himself.

He was bent on keeping the reins in his own hands as far as possible, and he realized that the best way of doing so was to grant an appearance of leadership to some one else. It was partly with this in mind, and partly with a view to still more important factors, that

he had picked the four young men now associated with him. They were reliable, rather serious-minded, well thought of, but not sufficiently conspicuous to arouse any jealousy outside of their own group, and not sufficiently self-assertive to make that kind of feeling crop up within the group itself.

Bartels, who held the position of head clerk in the office of a large metal corporation, was by far their most prominent member, but like the rest, he was modest and easy-going. Those rather passive qualities and his excellent connections were the reason why Keith had chosen him as the nominal bearer of a leadership which he meant in reality to exercise himself. Backed by a quartet of highly respectable and socially congenial average men, Keith felt that some day, when the proper moment arrived, he would be able to command the attention of a large enough portion of his colleagues.

Spring had come when they began their weekly meetings . . . Keith, Bartels, Herman Larsson, who used to assist Keith in studying English, Johan Stark, who worked with a public utility corporation, and little pleasure-loving but big-hearted Olof Johansson, who held a position as bookkeeper with a large retail dealer in textiles. They met by turns in the homes of the members, and their debates invariably ended with a cold supper, a glass of Swedish punch, and a game of *vira*. They had a splendid time, and Keith was enjoying himself tremendously. Even the routine of his office work, and business itself, seemed more bearable by reason of that activity.

He forgot the future to plunge whole-heartedly into what proved conducive to that co-ordination of his

whole being for which he had longed without knowing how to formulate what he was longing for. Yet, in the midst of all that pleasurable excitement, a small part of himself remained unsatisfied . . . a centre of disturbance that could not be eliminated or suppressed by the most abandoned surrender to his self-imposed task as organizer-in-chief to the wholesale clerks of Stockholm. Out of his vain efforts to lull that nagging clamour within himself to rest came a strange experience. . . .

VII

IT lasted only a few weeks. When it was all over, it seemed far more unreal than many dreams, but there was a taste left in Keith's mouth as if he had taken an enormous dose of one of those horrible medicines his mother used to force on him when he was still a small boy.

Keith smoked little, but now and then he had occasion to visit a small cigar store right across the street from the office of Brockhaus & Kjellin. A young girl with a rather sweet face was in charge of it. The more Keith saw of her the more his consumption of tobacco increased.

Sofie looked very attractive where she sat behind the counter, generally busy with a piece of sewing. Her manner with customers was pleasant but reserved. If any one went ever so little too far, she became freezingly dignified, and no amount of teasing or coaxing would bring her around. She was sensible, too, in her own quiet and simple way. Keith's respectfu

manner soon won her favour. It was quite plain she liked him.

One evening he asked permission to see her home after the closing of the store at eleven. She hesitated a moment, saying that she lived far out in the North End and had to walk.

"That's why I asked," said Keith.

It was far indeed and no street cars existed in those days. Sofie was apologetic but pleased. Keith didn't mind. After that he began to escort her regularly, and it gave him a strange satisfaction to do so. He learned about Sofie's family . . . humble working people . . . and about the difficulties of being in the tobacco business. . . .

One night, as they were about to part at her door, he told her suddenly that he loved her. She misunderstood him and began to cry. He reassured her as to his intentions, and she became as happy as she had been miserable a moment earlier. So they were engaged, and Keith informed his mother, who looked serious and troubled but said nothing.

Keith tried hard to make himself believe that he was as happy as Sofie seemed to be. Lisa was gone, but that didn't matter. There were others. And Sofie was a fine girl. Yet he was not at ease with himself.

After a week or so of engaged bliss, he met Felix Abrahamson on the street. Felix was a charming young Jew of good family, with whom Keith recently had struck up one of those flashlike friendships that sometimes endured astonishingly long, and sometimes ceased even more quickly than they began. He had been asked to Felix's home several times, had met

his parents and sisters, and had enjoyed himself very much in that unostentatiously refined atmosphere. Felix was almost as direct and outspoken in his ways as Keith himself, which formed an additional bond between them.

"Say, Keith," Felix shouted the moment he caught sight of his friend. "You met my sisters on Gustavus Adolphus Square a couple of nights ago, when they were walking home from the theatre with my brother-in-law. You had a young lady leaning on your arm, and yet you raised your hat to my sisters. As I know that you know what is becoming to a gentleman in such a situation, I gather that the matter is serious. . . . What in hell are you up to?"

Keith told. There was nothing else to do. And he had wished to take Felix into his confidence anyhow.

Felix let out a sharp whistle. Then he began to talk with his customary frankness about the implications of Keith's step. He knew the girl and had nothing to say against her. He was kindhearted and idealistic, too, but he judged this world and its ways far more acutely than his friend.

"You are such an awful fool about everything that concerns women," he concluded. "Now one thing is fortunately plain . . . that you have no chance of marrying for a good long while yet. And so the sooner you break off this silly thing, the better for both of you. It will hurt her, I know, but the hurt will be worse the longer you let this go on."

Keith did not get angry. He could not answer. A voice that came both from his heart and his head told him that Felix was right . . . that, in fact, Felix was merely expressing what he had been trying to tell him-

self. This voice told him, too, that he had never loved Sofie, and never could love her as, after all, he had loved Lisa . . . told him that they never had had or could have any real life in common.

He had been looking for something . . . for something that would be inexpressibly precious to him if found. He had hoped to find it with Sofie. He had tied himself to her in that hope. This hope had made her sacred to him. Now it had been proved vain. There was nothing to do but to break the tie that could not give him what he was looking for.

That evening he noticed one of Sofie's front teeth, which was slightly damaged and showed unbecomingly. He had seen it before, but never so conspicuously . . .

The next day he told her as gently as he could that he had made a mistake, and that neither one of them would be helped by a pretence at feelings that did not exist.

Sofie was crying softly when he finished.

"I knew it all the time," she sobbed at last, "but I hoped it wasn't true. . . . Oh, why couldn't you leave me alone. . . ."

There was no answer to give. Keith sneaked out of the store, humiliated but immeasurably relieved. He looked up Felix and told him.

"I wonder if you know how much of a brute you are," Felix mused. "But I must admit that you have more common sense than I gave you credit for. Come along to the Opera Café and let us have something to drink . . . Don Juan!"

Keith also brought the news to his mother. She looked serious and troubled, but said nothing as before. A few days later she remarked suddenly:

"I went in and had a talk with Sofie. She's a very nice girl and I felt obliged to make some sort of amends on your behalf. Of course, I am glad . . . but your utter lack of imagination frightens me."

"What was there to do," asked Keith, trying hard to appear unconcerned.

"Nothing," his mother confessed. "That's the worst part of it."

VIII

HE would be of age that year, and a reminder of it came late in the spring under the form of a summons to report for his term of service in the army. It was a period of transition. A law had already been passed for extension of the time of service, but much of the older, easy-going system still prevailed. "Gentlemen conscripts" were allowed to live in tents of their own and to have uniforms made to order for use after drill. Keith was called on to serve three weeks the first year and two weeks the next. That was all, and he looked forward to it as a lark.

It was arranged that he, Felix and a third acquaintance should share a tent. Keith's mother advertised for a uniform that had already been used and got one cheap that fitted splendidly. It made Keith feel almost like a real "volunteer."

The term began one of the last days of June, when the Swedish summer is at its best. It was like a vacation spent in the open.

Late one night, when twilight and dawn seemed to meet and mingle, the three friends drove out to the

camp of the First Life Guards on the Heath, as they call the vast open and uncultivated space on the northeastern outskirts of the city. They found their tent, paid a couple of enlisted men to pitch it for them, installed their baggage and dropped on their cots . . . "the soberest lot in this whole row, I bet you," as Felix put it.

At five in the morning the whirring drums awakened them, and they piled out again drunk with sleep, but eager to face their new conditions. Morning coffee from a tin cup, with nothing but dry bread as accompaniment, tasted astonishingly good at that time of the day. A few hours later they had received their regular army uniforms that made them look like veritable scarecrows, had been assigned to their respective companies, and were marching out of camp for their first drill. When they were through for the day, they were too tired to think of anything but a quick meal at the restaurant just outside the camp, a smoke, and a speedy retirement to their cots.

Keith fell into this routine as if it represented something he had long needed. He, who every morning in the city made the faithful Per come to his home for the office keys so that he could sleep half an hour longer, was now the first to respond to the call of the drum and the one who several times saved his less easily roused friends from being late at roll call. The drill had no terrors for him, thanks to his long training in school, and his familiarity with it insured good treatment on the part of the officers. The discipline, which irked so many of the others, seemed to come natural to him, and he took a secret pride in saluting every officer he met on his rare visits to the city, while

loudly maintaining with the rest that it was a damned nuisance.

The three weeks sped quickly and uneventfully, and the end came all too soon, it seemed to Keith. The whole period would hardly have left an impression behind it but for a simultaneous event that had nothing to do with his service.

Granny died when he had been in camp about a week. She passed away in her sleep, quietly and unobtrusively as she had lived. Word was sent to Keith by his mother. The funeral was to take place the next Sunday. Keith sent word back that he was ordered on church parade and could not get leave of absence.

He really tried to make himself believe that such was the case, but in his heart of hearts he knew that he didn't want to go. He had loved Granny very much at one time. The thought of her still softened his heart. But a funeral was a funeral . . . something to be avoided if any possible excuse could be found. And if he asked leave to go, he would have to don a clumsy and ridiculous parade uniform. That grotesque outfit might do for Sunday service in camp, when no outsiders were admitted, but to walk the streets of Stockholm in it . . . Keith quaked at the mere thought of it.

So Granny went to her last resting place without his escort . . . and there is no reason to think that she was troubled by it . . . the trouble being reserved for those who staid behind.

"Oh, Wellander, one moment," Keith's company commander stopped him after drill one day. "Some

one said that you lost a near relative last week."

"Yes, Captain," Keith replied, coming to attention a little more smartly and correctly than usual.

"Why in thunder didn't you ask leave to attend the funeral," was the captain's next question.

"It was Sunday," Keith stammered, blood-red in the face. "I was ordered on parade and thought no leaves were granted . . ."

"Not as a rule," the captain admitted. "But for such an occasion. . . . Who was it?"

"My grandmother, Captain," said Keith.

"I'm awfully sorry, Wellander," the rather bluff, but kindhearted officer went on. "I know it must have hurt you to stay away . . . and I wish you had told me . . ."

"Yes, Captain," Keith muttered, saluting again as he was dismissed.

Yes, Keith was hurt, but not in the manner his captain imagined. His prejudice against everything connected with death had been indulged, and his vanity had been salved, but nothing could save him from a sense of having acted like a cad.

And so, when the day of discharge came and the "gentlemen conscripts" marched singing back to town, decked out bravely for one more night in their privately made and owned uniforms, Keith plunged into the excitement of the occasion with feverish abandonment.

"I don't understand you," said Felix. "I thought you liked it out there, though heaven knows why you should, and now you are wilder than any one else about getting away."

"No, Felix," cried Keith, "I am drowning my sorrow because *die schönen Tagen in Aranjuez sind jetz zu Ende.*"

The sun had risen when he got home and let himself into his cubbyhole. His head swam a little, but his mind was unpleasantly clear. The door to the kitchen stood open. He looked in. The place was empty. Granny's favourite seat . . . the big square stool which he used to turn upside down as a small boy, so that his fancy might transform it into a storm-tossed ship or a fleet-flying reindeer sleigh . . . stood vacant in a corner by the window.

Slowly and carefully he closed the kitchen door again and crawled into bed. He tried hard to sleep, but his eyes bothered him, and at last he gave way . . .

He cried . . . over himself.

IX

KEITH'S return to civilian life was a signal for renewed activity on the part of the self-appointed organization committee. Everything was done to reach data bearing on their work. The constitutions and other records of already existing societies abroad were obtained and minutely studied. It was proposed not only to convince their fellow workers of the need and possibility of an organization, but to place before them a detailed program of work.

"Unless we do," said Keith, "we shall have to count with serious opposition from two quarters . . . from those who are too dull to imagine what such an organ-

ization can do, and from the timid ones who fear that we may try to do too much."

It was agreed that all economic questions in the larger sense should be carefully eliminated. Keith did not quarrel openly with this conclusion. He was still under the influence of Dr. Malmberg's teachings, and this was supported by the common attitude of his colleagues. Common workmen might strike for a raise in wages. Clerks were far above such methods. Theirs was a profession, and not a trade. The mere idea of combining in direct opposition to their employers was resented. Of course, most of the employers were tyrants, and their meanness was denounced in extravagant terms over many a glass of Swedish punch. But if they got too bad, one could always seek another job. While still in their employment, the motto of every clerk faithful to the proud traditions of his profession was "loyalty above all." And it was well, too, to guard against the time when one might be an employer oneself.

For this reason every precaution must be taken to convince the employers in advance that the only object of the new organization was mutual self-help and self-improvement of a kind that could not fail to win their approval. This limitation did not seem quite logical to Keith, but he was obliged to admit that any opposition on the part of the employers would be fatal, and so he joined with the rest in formulating five recognized lines of activity: Club rooms; lecture courses and classes in foreign languages; employment bureau; sick help; pensions.

What caused them more trouble than anything else was the question of social distinctions. Everybody

connected with a wholesale concern looked down upon those working in or for a store. Theoretically a bookkeeper was always a bookkeeper, and as such on the level of a wholesale clerk. In practice he fell to the level of an ordinary "counter jumper" the moment he accepted employment with a retail concern.

"Which means that you will have to leave me out," remarked Olof Johansson ruefully when they had got that far in their discussions.

No one had thought of it until then. The moment he spoke, they realized the embarrassing position in which both he and they had been placed. Johansson himself insisted that his feelings must not count, and that nothing could be more fatal to the new venture than a suspicion as to the proper standing of its membership. So it was regretfully agreed that, while he could and would continue his work with the committee, this would not entitle him to membership in the organization when formed. Keith fumed at the folly and injustice of it, but he was ruthless in his insistence that nothing else could be done without risking the success of the whole undertaking at the very outset.

The task of the committee was not confined to the drafting of a program. A great deal of missionary work had to be done in advance to prepare the ground. Most of it had to be done after working hours and in places where the members of the profession could be found in great numbers. Again Keith took the lead, and with a zest that may not have related exclusively to the purpose for which he was working. A great unrest drove him on. He hardly ever read anything. In fact, his eyes resisted curiously when he picked up a book, no matter what it was. He must

always be on the move. He craved company as never before.

The result was that he never spent an evening at home, and once or twice his mother complained of it, but Keith hardly heard her. Instead his evenings were spent at card parties and—more and more frequently—in restaurants and music halls which until quite recently had seemed hopelessly beyond him. He smoked and drank . . . not in excess, but, like everybody else, enough to be counted a good fellow and a welcome addition to any company. He made new acquaintances every day, and to all of them he talked one subject . . . organization. From an obsession it had developed into a mania. It had become a matter of personal pride with him. He had no particular sense of community with the group of men for whom he did all that work. It was the task itself, the sense of power it gave, the joy of overcoming difficulties, that impelled and stimulated him. He never stopped to think of what might happen when the task was finished. . . .

His new mode of living caused him to spend a great deal more money than he had been used to. Until then he had always been well ahead of his income, however small it was. Now, with much more to draw on, he was always behind, and he spent valuable time and attention watching Herr Brockhaus' temper and bank account for favourable opportunities to pry loose another driblet of his salary.

The partnership with Herr Kjellin had ended as suddenly and informally as it began. The name of the firm remained unchanged, but the junior partner never put in an appearance. The capital he brought

was gone. The business had expanded a good deal, but not enough, it seemed, to keep it going without constant financial manipulations. The affairs of Herr Brockhaus were as precarious as ever, and his objection to paying out salaries had never been greater.

The situation in this respect was peculiar. Keith counted on one hundred *kronor* a month as due to him, but he hardly ever succeeded in getting more than eighty-five or, at the most, ninety. It was like a game between them, but a game that annoyed and depressed Keith a great deal. Once, toward the end of a month, when he had drawn eighty *kronor* and tried to get the remaining twenty, Herr Brockhaus exclaimed with inexplicable irascibility:

"I don't like to pay any advances . . . I am too hard up myself to do so."

Advances, Keith cried to himself in surprise . . . the money he asked for had been earned during the previous month and was three weeks overdue. Advances, indeed!

He wondered whether Herr Brockhaus had forgotten his promise of a raise or meant to go back on it, but this fear he dismissed summarily, as his employer's word had always proved good in the past. He also speculated on the wisdom of asking outright what his salary was supposed to be, but the highly uncertain temper of Herr Brockhaus intimidated him, and perhaps he was also restrained by a fear of finding the reality less favourable than he had grown accustomed to think it. Finally he decided that it would be just as well to leave a part of his income standing with Herr Brockhaus. It would take care of that deficit, for one thing . . . in fact, this was already covered,

he figured out . . . and it would also provide him with a small fund of savings in case of an emergency.

How soon that emergency was to arise, Keith little suspected as the fall turned into winter and the conscientious little committee slowly approached the point where the results of their labours could be laid before an assembly of their fellow workers.

X

IT was Felix who persuaded him to go to the theatre that evening.

Keith liked a good show and would have gone frequently if he had had the money to do so. On the other hand, he didn't care so much that to refrain became a hardship. His attitude toward the stage was neither sufficiently naïve nor sufficiently sophisticated to make his enjoyment of it complete. He knew too much to be taken in as his mother was, for instance, and he did not know enough to grasp the deeper realities symbolized by the artificialities of plot and dialogue and scenery. Now and then a play like Arthur Fitger's "The Witch" or Strindberg's "The Journey of Lucky-Pehr" broke down his reserve and swept him on to rapt surrender. Then there was no thrill like it. But the very ecstasy of those infrequent occasions made him hold back the more afterward.

This evening, buxom, deep-voiced, Junoesque Caroline Brinkman played the main female part . . . a dissolute Roman empress . . . in a pseudo-classic drama. It was her rather than the play Felix wished Keith to see. And she had not been on the stage more than

a few minutes when Keith forgot everything else. Her costume was daring for the day and gave full chance to her rather voluptuous beauty. Her big, black, contemptuously passionate eyes seemed to catch and hold Keith personally. But it was her voice, the rich melody of her slightest speech, that enraptured Keith most of all.

He went home with that voice ringing in his ears. Echoes of it clung to him like a faint perfume lingering in a room long after the visit of an exquisite woman. Until then the theatre had been to him little more than a vivid form of reading . . . a place for a somewhat more telling presentation of ideas. Now he discovered that it had something else to offer . . . something which he didn't know whether to class as more or less . . . beauty of sound and vision. It was as if, for the first time, he had discovered the full possibilities of human speech . . . not only as a means to an end, but as an end in itself. And this discovery seemed in some mysterious way to revolutionize his conception of life as well as of the theatre.

He was not stage-struck. He had no desire to act, although he had once taken part in an amateur performance with some success. But he wanted to capture for his own use some of that compelling witchery with which Caroline Brinkman's speech was surcharged. And he wanted to see her again . . . meet her when she was just herself.

For several days he could think of nothing else. It took him a strong effort to give intelligent attention to the next discussion of the committee, which was an important one. In the midst of it, as Bartels was out-

lining the final steps leading up to the public meeting at which the proposed organization was to be established . . . or ignominiously rejected . . . a sudden thought flashed through Keith's brain . . . a solution, it seemed, of several problems confronting him . . .

It sprang from the conjunction of Caroline Brinkman and his work with the committee . . .

Why shouldn't he use politics as a means of getting out of business, and why shouldn't he study with Caroline Brinkman in order to develop himself into a trained political speaker?

The idea was so mad that he dared not voice it to any one . . . not even to Felix . . . but it was not too mad to act on . . . and so he did.

It took hard pleading to make Fru Brinkman consent to give him lessons, although it was well known that she took pupils.

"I have no objection to you personally," she said to Keith. "On the contrary, I like you. But you are now connected with a calling that offers a future worth having, and it would be a crime for me to lead you into such a hell of shams and intrigues and disillusionments as the theatre is."

Only when Keith practically swore that he had no intention and no desire to venture behind the footlights, would she finally undertake to read with him twice a week. And Keith began that same week.

It was hard work, and tedious. But he liked it. He had to learn long poems by heart and then read them aloud while Fru Brinkman kept nagging him and pulling him back until there was not a vestige of mean-

ing left in what he read, and he felt that, if she didn't let him go on for at least two lines without interruption, he would have to kill either her or himself.

She was kindly distant, but he could sense a great deal of interest behind her superficial reserve . . . an interest, however, that was palpably impersonal. And one day, when he had just read a whole poem by Snoilsky from beginning to end without a single calling down, the real nature of her interest showed itself openly.

"I am going to say something which I should not dare to say if you had not reassured me so completely in regard to your intentions," she began. "I really think you could make good on the stage . . ."

Keith was too moved to speak at once, but she caught a gleam in his eye that brought her to an abrupt halt.

"You bad, bad man!" she cried. "How could you dare to deceive me as you have done?"

"I have not deceived you," Keith defended himself. "I never thought of it until you spoke . . ."

"That's worse still," she moaned, and he could feel that she was quite sincere about it. "I should have bit off my tongue rather than speak as I did, if I had known. . . ."

"Please," Keith pleaded. "It would have come anyhow . . . I am sick of my work . . . have been for years. When I came to you, it was with a hope of finding a way out of it, though I had no thought of becoming an actor. . . . As I said, I never thought of it before. . . . But now I feel as if it had been in my mind all the time. . . . And my mind is made up."

She shrugged her beautiful shoulders as she said:

"Well, seeing that it's so, all I can do now is to give you all I have to give. . . . Will you please begin that poem over again."

XI

HE told the truth when he said that he had never before thought of becoming an actor. He also told the truth when he said that his mind was made up.

It happened in a second . . . on the spur of the moment, as those words of Caroline Brinkman's reached his ears. . . .

Afterward he thought it over more calmly, and his decision remained unchanged.

He knew that he could not go on indefinitely in the office of Herr Brockhaus . . . or doing the work of a wholesale clerk anywhere. He had stood it during the last twelve months only because of the diversion created by his work with the little committee of organization. His heart was still in that work . . . more than ever, perhaps, now when he knew that soon he would have no part in what he had striven so passionately to create. It filled him with a soft, self-pitying melancholy, but at the same time a voice within him seemed to whisper that it was just as well because, with the organization properly formed, his own interest in it might no longer prove as great as it had been.

In that moment of self-searching he realized also that the whole project into which he had put so much of himself might be seriously endangered if his new plans

should become prematurely known. How could he hope to carry others with him into an undertaking which he meant to desert the moment it was launched? So his new dream of a theatrical career must remain an absolute secret for some time to come. Not even Felix must know. To this resolution Keith stuck with a faithfulness that rather pleased himself . . . accustomed as he was, to overdo the Comtean principle of "living in the open day."

As for the plans themselves . . . well, they were very vague. He had to admit to himself how little he knew about the possible consequences of the step he proposed to take. Once more, it is to be feared, he was seeking an escape rather than planning a constructive action based on the clearly recognized needs and possibilities of his own nature.

XII

THE hour had struck . . . the hour to which Keith so long had looked forward as the proudest of his life.

In response to a call signed by the five members of the self-appointed committee . . . the other four having insisted that Johansson's name appear with theirs in spite of his probable disqualification later on . . . more than two hundred clerks were gathered in one of the assembly rooms of the Bourse, placed at their disposal through the influence of Bartels. The quality of the gathering was even more promising than its numerical strength. Some of the most prominent

nembers of the profession had shown up, and evi-lently in quite a different mood from that evinced at he O. K. Rask meeting.

Bartels opened the proceedings on behalf of the ommittee by calling for the election of a chairman, vhereupon the carefully primed Engstrand was ready vith the name of a widely known man who pos-essed a great deal of tact and very few personal ene-nies. The nomination was made unanimous. On aking the chair, Herr Kronholm simply remarked:

"We shall now hear through Herr Wellander what he committee of invitation has to propose."

This pushing of Keith to the forefront was not his own doing, although it agreed perfectly with his de-sires and intentions. The other four had thrown up heir hands in horror at the thought of having to make an extended public address, and so Keith had to be-come the official mouthpiece of the committee because no one else would or could play that part.

Keith stepped to the platform and took his place be-side the little table at which the chairman was seated. He carried in his hand a few sheets of paper contain-ng the outline of his address. These he put on the able as he turned to confront the sea of faces raised expectantly toward his own. And in that moment the paper and its contents passed completely out of his mind.

He felt as if he had split into two parts, one of vhich was speaking and the other thinking. Both processes went on simultaneously without interfering vith each other. But while his slightest thoughts vere recorded with abnormal vividness in his conscious-

ness, he knew nothing at all about what he was saying.

He had dreamed a dream, and his task was to make all those men at his feet share it. What did words matter? What did it matter whether that hour brought him triumph or defeat, homage or contempt? Nothing mattered but the dream itself . . . that alone! It must come true . . . they must be made to see what was so plain . . . that the word *impossible* was a creation of their own minds . . . for nothing could be impossible to men that really willed a deed, the realization of a dream. . . . All they had to do was to act in common, with momentary self-forgetfulness, and with certain faith in their own collective power to overcome any difficulties that might meet them. . . .

Then the thinking part of his mind went off on a new tangent.

He had had a dream, and it was theirs as well. . . . But he had a secret that was not, could not be, theirs. It was that secret, and not their sharing of the dream, that made the moment such a proud one for him. Of all those present, he was the only one ordained to have no share in the results of their realized dream. . . . Shortly he would no longer be one of them. . . . And yet it was he who had dreamt the dream and who was now making it theirs. . . .

He stopped . . . he had nothing more to say . . . not a word . . . and the program he was to present was forgotten . . . not a particle of it could be recalled by his frantically struggling mind . . . which meant that he had failed . . . that his expected hour of triumph had proved empty . . . that the dream itself might fail of realization. . . .

A loud noise, distant at first and then gradually approaching, called him back to himself, to the room, to reality.

They were applauding, all of them, vigorously . . . and the chairman, too. He caught the eyes of Engstrand, turned on him with a curiously mixed expression of surprise and approval. Then he dropped on a convenient chair as if some one had brought him down with a blow on the head. He heard faintly the well modulated voice of the chairman calling for discussion of the submitted proposition.

A middle-aged man rose from a front seat . . . a stranger to Keith, but apparently well known to the rest, judging by the general craning of necks and the murmur running through the place.

"I don't think we need any discussion," this man said quietly. "I am convinced for one, and I suspect that my own case is typical. So I take the liberty of moving a resolution calling for the immediate establishment of an organization according to the program so clearly and enthusiastically outlined by the gentleman speaking on behalf of the committee."

Keith stared incredulously at the man, trying honestly to detect whether he was speaking ironically.

But the resolution was carried with a roar, and in a few minutes more the meeting adjourned, a board of temporary officers having been appointed with Herr Kronholm as president and Keith as secretary.

In another minute scores of eager men crowded around Keith to press his hands. Then Engstrand came forward and grabbed hold of him with unwonted enthusiasm.

"Did you ever hear anything worse," Keith muttered to him.

"What are you raving about," demanded his friend.

"My talk," Keith tried to explain. "My failure. . . ."

"Your failure," Engstrand cried. "You talked like a streak of lightning for more than half an hour, and when you stopped, there was nothing more to be said. It was all there, and clear as a newly polished window pane. I didn't think you had it in you . . . to confess the truth."

"I didn't either," Keith replied ambiguously, convinced at last, but feeling very much as if a special miracle had been performed on his behalf.

However, the dream was safe . . . on the verge of final realization . . . and that alone mattered in the end, as he had remarked some time, or heard some one else remark . . .

"What are you going to do now, Herr Secretary," Engstrand asked next.

"Leave business to go on the stage," Keith broke out, hardly conscious of what he was saying.

"Still raving," Engstrand commented dryly as he put his arm through that of Keith. "You have worked too hard, my boy . . . that's what's the matter with you. Come on and let us have a glass of punch. You've deserved it."

Keith drank very little that evening. Yet he couldn't recall afterward how he got home.

A deep melancholy filled him. He was conscious of a loss of some kind . . . great and irreparable.

He had wanted to do something . . . and now it was done . . . and what of it?

Tomorrow he would have to go to the office as usual . . . and thanks to that mystical something which he had lost and could never get back, business would be just business again . . . a drudgery and a silly game, with no glamour of glorious dreams making it bearable. . . .

To the stage he did not give a single thought that night. It was quite forgotten for the time being.

XIII

MONTHS passed before Keith dared to let out his precious secret. Felix was the only one from whom he could not withhold it very long, and he had to face more than one wordy conflict with his outspoken friend before the latter submitted to the inevitable. Engstrand, fortunately, had forgotten all about Keith's indiscreet remark on the evening when the Wholesale Clerks' Association was formed.

The preliminary work was progressing nicely, and Keith acted faithfully as secretary without a word to the other officers about his private plans. By degrees he felt the leadership slip out of his hands, although his opinions were still received with polite respect.

His lessons with Fru Brinkman continued also, and as soon as she found that Keith was not to be swerved from his decision, she set out to help him according to

her best ability. At her suggestion, Keith called on Herr Magnusson, director of one of the foremost private theatres in Stockholm.

Keith succeeded in seeing the great man . . . who proved to be a small, vizen-faced old chap, with a soured temper and the tongue of a viper. No, he rasped out, there was no opening in his company, and if there were, Keith wouldn't have a chance anyhow, and for this Keith ought to be thankful, as no dog's life was worse than that of an actor, and in addition he, the speaker, would like to know why every conceited young fool in Stockholm should think himself fitted for such a divinely inspired calling as that of the actor, and in particular, why they should think him. Herr Magnusson, destined to be a dry-nurse for embryonic actorines, and so on *ad infinitum*.

"Thank you," Keith murmured as he bowed himself out of Herr Magnusson's book-encased workroom, his mind too relieved at getting away from that vitriolic shower of words to permit of any other thoughts.

Prompted again by Fru Brinkman, he asked for and received an appointment with Herr Director Sparrgren, head of a travelling company held second in reputation only to that of the Royal Theatre at Stockholm. This man, who had begun life as a simple workman and who had raised himself by his bootstraps to the acknowledged position as one of the best actors in the country, proved a little less discouraging than Herr Magnusson, though he, too, showed an inclination to regard Keith's errand as somewhat of an insult to himself. He was very dark, of an almost oriental cast, and gave an impression of

great fatigue with life in general and his visitor in particular. He spoke in a drawling, tired voice, as if each word cost him a tremendous effort.

"Can you sing," he asked.

"No," Keith replied. "I didn't think. . . ."

"Can you play any instrument," the director interrupted.

"N-no," stammered Keith. "Why. . . ."

"Have you an ear for musiq?"

"I fear not," Keith confessed, "though I am very fond of it."

"That settles it," Herr Sparrgren declared, apparently on the verge of total collapse. "No one can hope to become an actor who isn't musical."

"But," Keith protested, hot with fear, "I have studied with Fru Brinkman, and she says . . . won't you let me read something to you at least?"

"Go on," said Herr Sparrgren in a tone fraught with despair. "Not that it will make any difference. . . ."

Keith read the poem by Snoilsky which had drawn from his teacher the admission that he might do for the stage.

Herr Sparrgren listened patiently to the end and then shook his head sadly.

"As I thought," he groaned. "It's no use . . . music . . . ah, music . . . that's the foundation of everything. . . ."

Keith left hopelessly. Three days later he was back again without any promptings from Fru Brinkman. And contrary to expectation, he was admitted.

"You again," Herr Sparrgren frowned. "As I said before . . . what is the use?"

"That's what they all said to you at first," Keith shot back, having in the meantime learned a little more about the other's history.

Herr Sparrgren sat up almost straight, and his eyes opened completely for the first time. Then he sank back again.

"I have worked," he gasped. "I have conquered . . . the effort was gigantic . . . and you . . . what do you want me to do?"

"Let me read something else," Keith hastened to answer. "Poems have really nothing to do with the stage. . . ."

"Oh, they haven't?" said Herr Sparrgren, opening his eyes for the second time. "Well, what do you know?"

"Nothing," Keith admitted.

"I thought so," the director remarked darkly. Then he grabbed a manuscript bound in coarse brown paper. "Read . . . anywhere."

Keith opened the manuscript at random and read.

Herr Sparrgren had dropped into a reclining position on a chaise-longue. Now he began to writhe and wriggle like a man suffering from an excruciating tooth-ache. Little moans escaped him now and then. Finally he turned his face to the back of the chaise-longue and seemed to go to sleep.

Keith stopped.

A minute passed . . . two . . . three . . .

Neither one moved.

Then a slight quiver passed through the man on the chaise-longue.

"It's awful," he whispered, "awful . . . awful

. . . but come back next Thursday . . . I am not quite so sure of my theory about music. . . ."

Keith lived through the next few days in an agony of suspense. He felt that Herr Sparrgren was getting even with him in full measure for every pang caused by his reading. Those days passed like all others, however, and at the appointed hour he stood once more in the presence of Herr Sparrgren, now seated at an enormous writing table.

More reading . . . more groans . . . but also a word or two of grudging acknowledgment.

"Not quite impossible . . . perhaps . . . with tremendous application . . . work, work, work. . . ."

And at the end of their interview Keith found himself engaged as a sort of volunteer actor in Herr Sparrgren's new company with a monthly salary of one hundred *kronor,* or just as much as he was getting . . . or supposed to be getting, at least . . . from Herr Brockhaus. In addition to acting, however, Keith would also have to fill the position of assistant stage manager, or more correctly property man, in order to warrant Herr Sparrgren in paying him such an exorbitant salary from the very start.

He was to report in a northern city about the middle of July, the travelling expenses to that point coming out of his own purse.

Keith would have said yes and amen to anything.

What did it matter so long as he was admitted to that world of which those who knew it best spoke with such acrid bitterness and such almost sacrificial devotion?

Just because he knew so little about that world, his admission to it became such an incredible adven-

ture. Fame and fortune might be waiting for him within its shaky canvas portals. That, however was a secondary consideration. The essential one was his separation from that tall office stool on which he had perched so long that all the varnish had disappeared from its top.

Buttons, ribbons, buckles, textiles, copy-book indexes, accounts, bills, packages, invoices, tailors, samples, numbers, Herr Brockhaus. . . .

Oh, Lord, how could he possibly have managed to bear with them as long as he had done?

Seven years . . . seven of his best years. . . .

XIV

HE would have preferred to drop his old life and begin the new one that very minute. Instead he must wait many weeks. His one consolation was that those weeks could and must be used for various preparations. First he must make sure of the money needed for his new start, and he hugged himself delightedly at the thought of the small hoard that had accrued to him during the last eighteen months because of his employer's unwillingness or inability to pay his full salary on time. It should almost be sufficient to meet his needs, and he never doubted getting it.

Another consoling thought was that, while he must bestride that hateful office stool for a while yet, his precious secret could now be proclaimed to the world.

"Oh, yes," he remarked several times a day quite casually, "I am through with clerking . . . I am going

on the stage . . . as a member of the famous Sparrgren company. . . ."

Some jeered openly and others sneered secretly. A few wished him luck. Most of those who heard him seemed to fear that over-work or the success of his organization movement had turned his head. Little did he care. It was all glorious and by and by they would see. . . .

His parents took the news bravely. They were prepared for anything by that time. His father attempted a mild remonstration but was easily reduced to silence by his son's enthusiasm. His mother was a little worried about the reputed immorality of the stage, but found herself laughed out of court. Talk of faith moving mountains . . . had not his faith brought into existence an organization which for thirty years had been declared impossible? Surely such a faith was capable of more than one miracle.

Herr Brockhaus was not so easily disposed of. At first he would not listen at all. He merely laughed. Then he became very angry and repeated his previous refusal . . . from the time when Keith was going to America . . . to hear of any such nonsense. At last Keith was pleased to notice that he seemed genuinely grieved and a little discouraged when convinced of the finality of the latter's plan to leave him and business for a career so full of uncertainties.

Nothing was said about the salary. Keith thought he had better wait for an opportune moment, when no notes were coming due and the bank account stood a little above average. Before such a moment arrived, Herr Brockhaus himself brought the matter to a head in a rather startling manner.

"There is one thing I have wanted to talk to you

about for some time," he said one afternoon. "I have gone over the books, and . . ."

His tone and manner were most friendly. Yet Keith shrank from the words he knew to be coming. He guessed that they would refer to the petty cash account, and he tried to brace himself by the thought of his long overdue salaries.

"And you owe me nearly five hundred *kronor,*" Herr Brockhaus went on.

"Five hundred!" Keith exclaimed as if not trusting his own ears. "Are you referring to the petty cash account, Herr Brockhaus?"

"In part," his employer answered. "To that also, but . . ."

"It's only short about two hundred *kronor,*" Keith broke in.

"Yes, but I have also let you have advances on your salary from time to time," Herr Brockhaus continued imperturbably, "and these amount by now to nearly three hundred *kronor,* which, of course, must be paid back . . . plus the shortage in the petty cash account. . . ."

"I didn't take that money," Keith cried, too exasperated to listen patiently any longer. "It was Herr Tverholm. . . ."

"Herr Tverholm," his employer repeated in evident surprise. "What has he got to do with it?"

Whereupon Keith told the whole story of the deficit at last. Herr Brockhaus listened with a serious face.

"I am sorry," he said. "I thought it was nothing but the ordinary leakage, and as you have had the

account . . . seven years, I think . . . the amount was not astonishing. But you were responsible for it, and I thought it only right that you should pay . . . Now, of course, your responsibility is much more clear. . . . You should have told me the very first time. . . ."

"I tried," Keith interposed, "and you wouldn't listen. . . ."

"You should have insisted," Herr Brockhaus came back at him firmly. "You have acted like a damned fool, Wellander, and if I didn't know you so well . . . of course, you realize. . . ."

"Yes," said Keith unhappily, "and I have never thought of leaving it unpaid. . . . That was one reason why I didn't mind your holding back part of my salary as you did. . . ."

"What are you talking of," demanded Herr Brockhaus with puckered brows. "I don't understand a word. You have got your full salary up to date, and nearly three hundred *kronor* besides."

The young man and the older one stood staring at each other as if each had suspected the other one of being slightly deranged.

"When I wanted to go to America," Keith tried at last, "you promised me. . . ."

"Oh," Herr Brockhaus exclaimed as if seeing a light at last. "What did I promise?"

"A raise to one hundred a month as soon as your books were balanced," Keith explained, struggling hard to speak calmly.

"No," rejoined his employer. "That's nearly right, but not quite. I promised you a raise when I had bal-

anced my books and *made sure that I could afford it.* My books showed that it was quite out of the question . . . much to my regret. Even now I couldn't pay that much . . . if you were to stay . . ."

"Why didn't you tell me," Keith interjected with a sinking heart.

"Why didn't you ask? No, my dear Wellander, it is a clear case, and I want this matter settled before you leave. I am glad to regard it . . . all of it . . . as a debt incurred with my consent, but that is as far as I can go."

There was nothing more to say, and Keith went home too dejected to consider his next step. One moment he raged inwardly at the treachery of his employer, as he called it, and the next he was prone to accept what had happened as a just punishment for his own weakness.

What was the use, he cried to himself at last. Money . . . always money . . . and because he lacked it, he was doomed. . . .

XV

AFTER a while the inherent resiliency of his nature asserted itself as it had done many times before. He began to look around for means of solving the new and quite unforeseen problems confronting him. It was not enough to meet the situation at the office. He must also raise money for travelling and living expenses until his first monthly salary with the Sparrgren company was due.

Hard as it came, he decided to speak to his father,

who took it better than Keith had dared to hope, although he looked serious and dejected while listening to his son's story.

"Debts are hell," he said at last, "and some are worse than others. This one must be settled as quickly as possible, and I shall go up and have a talk with Herr Brockhaus about it."

So he did, and the outcome of it was that he assumed full responsibility for his son's obligations. With this arrangement Herr Brockhaus declared himself fully satisfied.

"But it isn't right," Keith protested, relieved but incensed, when he heard it . "He promised me definitely. . . ."

"He says not," the father interrupted, "and you have no proofs to the contrary. You have acted very thoughtlessly and stupidly . . . in all sorts of ways. . . . Do you think you can pay anything out of your salary?"

"I fear not," Keith replied, thoroughly unhappy. He had a fair idea of what this new financial burden must mean to his father, and it was his fault . . . completely . . . no matter how he looked at it. This was a thought he could not face squarely, and yet he could not escape from it either. Gradually it turned into a malignant growth that tended to attract and enhance everything else in his life that could strengthen his sense of personal worthlessness.

Yet he had to go on. He neither could nor would return to Herr Brockhaus. And while some of the glamour had been taken out of his new start, it was a change, and a sweeping one at that. As such it drew him and urged him on as much as ever.

Felix saw that he was seriously worried and pleaded for his confidence, which Keith finally gave in full detail. It was a great relief to be able to pour it out to a sympathetic and yet disinterested listener.

"You are more of a fool than I thought you," Felix remarked at last. "It is lucky, indeed, that you are getting out of business. You have about as much sense in money matters as a pig has appreciation of pearls."

"That's what you said about me and women," Keith tried to smile.

"And I was right," Felix insisted. "But you are far worse in regard to money . . . I don't understand at all . . . there are all sorts of things that you take much more seriously than I do, and I think that you are about as honest as they are made, but when it comes to money . . . you don't seem to have any sense of responsibility concerning it."

"I hate it," Keith cried between clinched teeth. "And sometimes I wonder whether I haven't come by that state of mind honestly, as they say. . . . Do you know, my father has often said that the vast sums he has to handle daily as a collector makes it impossible for him to take his own little affairs seriously. . . ."

"There is more in that than you probably think," Felix mused. "But it hasn't made a fool of your father, for all that. . . ."

Then he went over to his writing table and pulled out a bank book showing a balance of about one hundred and fifty *kronor*.

"I have no particular use for it," he said, handing the book to Keith, "and I want you to take it. You know that I am getting a pretty decent salary from

my uncle, and as I am his heir, he will let me have anything I ask for. . . ."

Keith hesitated and objected for a while, but in the end he accepted his friend's offer gladly and thankfully. Thus all his financial problems were solved, and he could go ahead with his preparations.

The fly in his ointment was that those problems had been solved by others. They paid, and he got what they paid for. Would he ever reach a point where he could pay for himself?

XVI

KEITH had practically forgotten Gustaf Hardin, the friend of Lützow's who used to attend the meetings of the League of Youth once in a while, and so he was rather surprised to find himself stopped by him on the street one day.

"You didn't come to the funeral," Hardin said with a note in his voice that sounded unmistakably hostile.

"What funeral," Keith asked, looking puzzled.

"Haven't you heard?" This time it was Hardin who showed surprise. "I am talking of Lützow."

"Lützow," Keith cried with a peculiar sense of contraction about the heart. "Do you mean to say that he. . . ."

"Yes . . . at twenty-six." Hardin's face twisted painfully as he spoke. "The finest man that ever lived . . . and for the sake of a rotten woman whom he was fool enough to befriend . . ."

"Lützow. . . ." Keith gasped incredulously.

"Oh, he was human," Hardin rejoined impatiently.

"And so help me God, I think it was the only time he ever . . . and this town is full of fools and reprobates who do nothing else and escape . . ."

"But I don't understand," Keith ventured.

"Of course, you don't," Hardin bit him off wearily. "Your one chance when you get into serious trouble of that kind, is to take care of yourself, and that is what Lützow wouldn't do. He was just about to pass his final examinations . . . and you know what they meant to him . . . and so he went on working as before . . . and it simply killed him. . . ."

Then his weariness passed and he flared up sharply:

"You owed him twenty *kronor* which you never paid him back."

"Why . . . yes . . . I think I did," Keith muttered, taken back by the sudden turn of their talk. "I had forgotten all about it . . . But how do you know?"

"Because his mother asked me to go through his papers. . . . Of course, you had forgotten . . . you always do, and you always will . . . and he would never say a word about it. . . . It's the Lützows that pay their own way . . . and yours as well. . . ."

He departed abruptly, leaving Keith in a state of mind bordering dangerously on madness. Coming right on top of his recent experience at the office, the meeting with Hardin, the news about Lützow, and particularly Hardin's parting words, seemed to shake him to the very foundations of his being.

So Lützow was dead . . . dead in such a manner . . . Lützow, to whom he had not given a thought for so long . . . Lützow, who more than any other person had seemed what he himself wanted to be . . .

Lützow, who had given so generously of his precious time, and even of his money. . . .

Was there any one so poor, miserable, good for nothing as he, Keith Wellander?

Dead . . . in such a manner . . . what a silly thing life was!

XVII

KEITH had left the office at last. His simple preparations were completed. In two days more he would be on his way north on board one of those large coastwise steamers he had watched so often down on the Quay as a boy.

It was July in Sweden . . . sunlight that lingered like a dying tone through the tenderly pale night . . . the time of love and restored life . . .

He went over to Felix and found him at home.

"We must do something to celebrate," said Felix. "What about Nacka?"

Keith shook his head. The little inn at Nacka, nestling between tall green trees that seemed to grow both ways . . . toward the sky and down into the mirroring waters at their feet . . . Nacka was a temptation, but . . . he was trying so hard to be sensible . . .

"On me," said Felix, guessing the cause of Keith's hesitation. "We can't afford it, of course, and that makes it so much jollier."

So they went, and had dinner in the open, and dreamt over their coffee and punch, and talked soberly of all the fun they had had together, and finally they

drove home again through the summer night that seemed to breathe softly like a woman between sleep and waking.

At last they parted . . . to meet, they knew not when.

A deep melancholy had seized Keith.

He stood in the doorway looking up and down the lane as he had done that night just after they moved there. Now as then the lane was empty, and he was alone with his own thoughts . . . but, oh, what a difference in every other respect . . . !

An old saying was running through his head . . . not one of Granny's, but one that he had come across in some English book:

"A rolling stone gathers no moss."

And he was rolling . . . always rolling . . . on and on . . . and no goal in sight . . . but roll he must . . . it was his fate. . . .

Once he had a dream . . . not the one passed on to a lot of other people, who were now treating it as their own . . . but one that he had kept to himself, and would keep . . . about a lot of gates that were opening to let him through, and the more gates he passed, the more were left ahead of him unopened. . . .

It was a foolish thing to dream . . . and he felt so very, very tired.

PART FOUR

I

THE swift, comfortable steamer carried him northward through the archipelago, unrolling a series of vistas that were all new to him . . . green or grey, graceful or stern, closely bounded by villa-studded shores or unbounded by anything but the blink of distant waters, as the route swerved landward or toward the open Baltic. Stockholm lay far behind, vanished out of sight long ago, and so did a whole phase of his life. While ahead of him lay . . . what?

The land stood darkly against the fading glow of the sunset, the land of his birth, the land of his forefathers. . . . Who were they, after all? What had they done? Did he really in any way belong to them, and to that strip of land toward which the crystalline twilight of the northern summer night was now stealing out of the sea that breathed with deceptive softness on his right? He seemed to himself so strangely detached, as if he belonged nowhere in particular . . . as if, in fact, there were nowhere any place for him. . . .

He was sitting on the after-deck, far back, where he had a free view to both sides. A smiling, large-bosomed Hebe had brought him coffee and a pint of Swedish punch, golden, languid and insidious. A gentle, unquestioning lassitude seemed to be waiting at his

shoulder, ready to take full possession of him, if he would only surrender himself to it. But his mind persisted in its pointless raising of questions . . . questions that could be answered only by an omniscience in which he did not believe. . . .

As far back as he could remember, he had been engaged in a search of some kind, never knowing very clearly what he was looking or hoping for. At first it seemed to be freedom . . . the right to dispose of himself and his own existence as he chose. Then, after having won that freedom, it seemed to be knowledge . . . understanding of what freedom meant, and what he should do with himself, now it was won. Then again it seemed to be a central point of some kind, a lever with which to move his own peculiar world, an interest strong enough to stimulate every part of his scattered, recalcitrant self into concerted, harmonious action, directed toward a clearly conceived goal.

But always, in the midst of this search, he had been conscious of another one, going on side by side with it, parallel to it, or intertwined with it . . . a search for co-ordination and stimulation of another kind, on another plane . . . a search for women . . . for *the* woman . . . for love, as they called it. Apparently there must be two things wanted by his own self with equal imperativeness . . . two things that were needful in making life worth living . . . and neither one of them would make up for the lack or loss of the other. Work and love . . . love and work . . . those were the twain columns without which no equilibrium was thinkable.

And yet . . . he had worked hard and loved whole-

heartedly, and nothing had come out of either work or love. For a time it seemed as if he had found a work worth doing, but no sooner was it done than he found himself as empty-souled and hungry as ever. And in love he had never even approached the goal of his longing. . . .

Women were so strange . . . all of them. They fell into two classes, and each of these was more unaccountable than the other. On one side were the women you loved and revered and shielded from the maelstrom of your senses. On the other were those for whom you cared not at all except in so far as your dire need drove you to them. These were the women who offered you the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil. The others were the angels guarding the gates of Eden. And if you ate of the fruit, you were driven out of paradise, and if you didn't . . . well, why think of it while the honeyed punch stood mellowly like a sunset glow in its glass? But those two kinds of women represented things that bore the same relation to each other as work and love. You needed both. You must have your fruit of knowledge and the soft, sweet assurance of your paradise. Without either you were unhappy. And to get either . . . that was the worst part of it . . . all women, no matter what their kind or class, demanded as their due something which he did not seem to have. . . .

There was Hebe that brought the punch, for instance. . . . Not that he cared very much whether she lived or died, but as she came close to him, the air about him became charged with desire . . . not for her, but for something or some one that would make his being complete. . . . No, he didn't care,

but he tried to shape words like those he had heard dropping glibly from the lips of other men under similar circumstances. Then she looked at him for a moment . . . looked as if she had wondered why she should put a tray full of good things in front of an empty chair. After that she passed on to another customer, and the moment she caught sight of him, her whole expression changed. . . . The man was a drummer beyond all doubt . . . coarse, commonplace and loud. . . . He reminded Keith of Herr Tverholm. . . .

Keith shook himself. The night had come on, but of darkness there was nothing but a shadow nestling close to the distant shore. To eastward the sea lay seemingly boundless, with a touch of white here and there glistening briefly in the pale light that stood like a glass clock over the earth. The steamer was swaying slowly from one side to the other, and pushing steadily onward as it swayed, with a faint hissing sound.

He was through with the phase of which Herr Tverholm had been a part and a symbol . . . through with all of it . . . at a price, most of which had been paid by others. It was of no use to look back at it. Better look straight ahead, toward that future for which the steamer was heading so resolutely, its bow cutting any opposing wave with a quick swish-swish. What was it he expected out of that future?

The theatre . . . he tried to picture what it meant to him, and what his life might be in its service, but it was like trying to find a firm point among the waves that came rolling landward in endless sequence. . . . His ignorance was so complete. He might as well

try to find his way unguided through a thick forest at midnight. . . . But try he must, it seemed. Perhaps it was the punch . . . perhaps the breeze that was quickening perceptibly. . . . His mind went on spinning its thread of futile thought, and he could only watch it. . . .

A phrase ran through his head, caught somewhere and mysteriously preserved for this moment: "the importance of the drama." Of course, the drama was important, as was the novel, etc. And the theatre served the drama. That was its mission as a whole. But this mission had little to do with the men and women working in the theatre . . . with himself, for instance. To them . . . to him . . . it was a field of individual endeavour and expression . . . a place where he, Keith Wellander, would continue the search that had already come to naught in other fields. What he wanted from it was a profit of some kind . . . spiritual, perhaps, but wholly personal. . . . When obtained, it would also mean a great deal to others, but never as much as to himself. . . . What was it?

And so he was back at his starting point again. . . .

Fame and praise and applause . . . his recent organization work had brought him a taste of those things, but not enough to turn his liking for them into a compelling lure. And while he felt sure of making good on the stage, sooner or later, in one way or another, he had not yet been able to imagine what a success of that kind might imply. . . .

He did hope that the work might prove interesting in itself, and not a daily drudgery like his monotonous toil in the office. That word *interest* seemed the

pivotal point of so many things. Where it figured, the path was easy, and when it failed, going ahead was like butting one's head against a wall. Duty was a mere empty formula which had to be acknowledged as one passed on in pursuit of things nearer one's heart. If connected with something that gave one pleasure in doing it, then one did not think of it as duty. If that pleasure failed, then duty became a barren and unprofitable thing from which one fled if possible, and to which one submitted only out of dire necessity. Business was duty without pleasure, and he was now in full flight from it. . . .

Pleasure . . . the word held him. There was around it a lustre as of paradise, and a lure as of the fruit offered by the women who have eaten from the tree of knowledge. It was the twin brother to the word interest, and often it was hard to tell those two apart. Pleasure . . . yes, he wanted it, but he was willing, nay, anxious, to take it in the guise of interest. This was what he had tried to do so far. He would continue to strive for the same thing. His nature did not crave a kind of pleasure that died and turned to dust with the moment that bore it. But if he could find it in no other form, then he would take it as it came. . . .

He recalled the night when they were discharged from army service and he abandoned himself to the current that swept the little host of boisterous youths toward the flame of pleasure like so many moths . . . and the end of it was that he found the kitchen empty and Granny gone to her grave . . . and . . . oh, yes, he did cry that night . . . over something. . . .

Pleasure . . . it was a double-edged sword, and it

seemed that most of those who tried to handle it cut themselves. It was like the fruit of knowledge . . . it was one and the same, the fruit and the sword . . . but you couldn't keep away from it. . . .

The boat was rolling pretty hard . . . or was it the punch? Hebe had gone to bed, and the fruit of knowledge was locked up in a cupboard for the night. . . .

Perhaps he, too. . . .

II

THE company trickled in during three or four days, the younger and less important ones first, then those of firmly established reputation, and last of all the director with his wife.

More than a dozen of them, men and women, met in the garden of the Railway Hotel on the third day of Keith's stay in Gefle. There they formed a steadily growing group around a couple of tables laden with coffee pots and punch bottles. At the tables around them staid burghers, dignified officials and garrulous drummers were also having their obligatory after-dinner coffee and punch, and Keith noticed with considerable pride how all eyes were drawn toward the group of which he formed a part. It was the first significant point of which his mind took note . . . that to be an actor was to be conspicuous, a little apart from ordinary people, especially outside of Stockholm.

Mainly, however, he gave attention to his new colleagues, to whom he was introduced as they appeared, and who seemed to pay just as much, or as little, heed

to him as if he had been one of them all his life. That was the second point . . . that off the stage they were all officers. On his right was Fru Karell, an unassuming, sweet-faced and soft-spoken lady who looked anything but an actress and whose name nevertheless was familiar to every theatre lover in the provinces. On his left sat a rather taciturn young man with a typical actor's face . . . smooth, strongly modelled, and yet mobile . . . who soon introduced himself as Palm, the stage machinist. It was from Palm that Keith got most of his information about the rest, whose names, as a rule, told him nothing:

Eskilson, the veteran of the company . . . heavy-jowled, peery-eyed and cynically wise; Linder . . . young, grouchy and arrogant with recently achieved triumphs in parts supposed to be reserved for his elders; Ingeborg Olsson . . . whose position as ingénue was belied by her snub-nose, her slang, and her impulsiveness of speech and gesture; Hultman and Carlsson . . . known as the two Dromios, partly because they were never apart, and partly because they were such perfect contrasts . . . the former small and dry and hook-nosed, with a passion for snuff . . . the latter young, tall, vain, and gifted with an almost Grecian profile that held nothing behind it; Snellman, the stage director . . . short of stature, with peppercorns for eyes and a tangled black beard that covered the greater part of his chest. . . .

The talk was entirely professional and largely personal. And through every word spoken Keith seemed to catch the unseen presence of the power whom they worshipped and despised . . . the public. It was the

third significant point . . . that ultimately every appeal and every endeavour must be referred to an outside arbiter, before whom the director himself had to bend his knees as deferentially as the humblest member of his troupe. It was a revelation of almost revolutionary importance. In the office, Herr Brockhaus had constituted the final authority, beyond whom there was no appeal. But on the stage. . . .

"Oh, yes," Keith heard Linder say, "that fool was going to pick a quarrel with me as soon as we reached Norrköping . . . merely because I would not play a French duke as if he were an Eskilstuna iron monger . . . but first he needed me for the opening bill, which was Sardou's 'A Glass of Water,' and when the curtain came down for the last time that night after I had taken my fifteenth call, he wept on my shoulder and told me it was the proudest evening in his life, and he would never let me go . . . and the next day I signed up with Sparrgren, of whom I wish I knew a little more. . . ."

"As an actor," said Eskilson, blinking like an owl, "he is a four-flusher, but he knows how to get the public. . . ."

"And I have yet to find a man who knows much more about the stage than Alexander Sparrgren," Snellman, the stage manager, put in between two puffs at his bulldog pipe.

"If he does know so much," Linder declared irately, "why does he hire a whole regiment? There are twenty-eight of us, I think, not counting yourself, the prompter, the costumers and such people. There won't be a decent chance for any one of us."

"Is our company really that large," inquired Keith of Palm in a whisper and received an affirmative nod in reply.

"We have to have it for 'Hamlet' alone," Eskilson rejoined, "not to mention the rest of our repertory. . . ."

"Oh, 'Hamlet' be damned," Linder cried. "There isn't a part in it I care to play."

"I am doing the First Grave-digger," little Hultman piped up.

"And it's better than the second in Stockholm," Eskilson jeered.

"And I don't think we are too many," Hultman went on unheeding. "But when it comes to quality . . . what do you think of Sandberg as a lover, for instance?"

"Hush," Ingeborg Olsson interposed. "Here comes Sandberg now!"

A minute later Keith saw Hultman and Sandberg greet each other as long separated friends, and at the same time he heard the former felicitate the latter on his latest success and his splendid new moustaches.

"Yes, you can look happy and contented," Linder remarked bitterly to Sandberg, "you who are the only one in this bunch with nothing to do but to look handsome. But there are six of us character actors who are supposed to live on our brains. . . ."

"That's news," Sandberg flung back in his mellowest, most lover-like tone. "I thought you lived chiefly on the name your father left you."

"As if you didn't know that the memory of his fame is my greatest handicap," Linder cried with flashing eyes. "But, of course, your father. . . ."

"Is a tailor," Sandberg said, pushing forward a rather prominent chin, "and thanks to him, I have always been able to do justice to my natural advantages."

At hearing Sandberg's reference to his sartorial descent, Keith made a slight start which was misinterpreted by Palm.

"Don't worry," the young machinist said in an undertone. "We shed nothing but words in this profession."

Keith liked Palm better than all the rest. He seemed less unintelligible. And when Keith walked back to the furnished room he had rented after staying a day at the Railway Hotel, he was glad to find that Palm lived in the same direction.

"I must confess that I never in my life struck a funnier bunch," Keith said when they were about to part.

"They are all crazy with conceit," said Palm reassuringly. "But they are as nice a set of people as you can find in any company."

"What makes them so . . . conceited," Keith asked.

"The public," Palm replied as he was leaving. "The theatrical profession would be the finest in the world if it were not for the damned public."

III

REHEARSALS began promptly . . . first on a French farce with which the season was to open. Only those in the cast attended. The rest were loafing in the garden of the Railway Hotel or studying parts in other plays. But Keith got a hint

from Herr Sparrgren to attend all rehearsals although not a single part had yet been given him.

Everything was so different from what he had imagined, and for a while he was too absorbed by what he saw to chafe at being a mere spectator.

The yawning gulf of the empty and unlighted auditorium with its spectral rows of barely distinguishable seats . . . the bare, barn-like stage, with newly arrived backdrops piled in the rear and long ropes dangling suggestively from the mysterious regions above . . . the movable gas jets by the footlights competing feebly with the surrounding blackness . . . the actors and actresses in street clothes scattered over the lower part of the stage and making themselves as comfortable as circumstances would permit . . . the director, the stage manager and the prompter in a group by the footlights facing the rest . . . the perfunctory reading of parts from little sheaves of manuscript . . . the stream of jerky comments from the director noted down by the stage manager or the members of the cast . . . the whole businesslike process of building up a production by first assembling its bare bones, so to speak, seemed to Keith almost indecent, but also tremendously fascinating. It was a form of systematic organization, almost scientific in its procedure, that his rather precise mind could appreciate and that held his breathless attention until he knew just how it was done and ached to be doing it himself.

For this reason he turned the more eagerly to his duties as property man . . . or assistant stage manager, as he preferred to call it . . . while not yet permitted to assume his duties as an actor. But all his efforts to make himself useful to the bearded Herr

Snellman met with gentle but firm rebuffs. The stage manager was one of those who never reach full development because of their inability to delegate power. He was fussy as an old maid about the exact placing and handling of every object, and the miscarriage of a small detail seemed of greater importance than the saving of any amount of time in the stage setting. Keith's natural orderliness should have impressed him, but he could see nothing except the beginner's inevitable awkwardness, and rather than waste time and energy on directions, he did everything himself . . . padding catlike around the stage on errands that no other human soul could divine. And he was as jealous of his property lists and stage diagrams as of his authority.

So there was nothing for Keith to do but to occupy his lonely seat in the auditorium and possess his soul in patience while watching the strange antics of the players as they began gropingly to outline the movement of the play. It took him quite a long time to grow tired of it. But a moment came, as come it must, when he felt that he would scream like a victim on the rack if he had to sit there much longer silent, passive and useless.

When that juncture was reached, he began sneaking away as often as he dared to the garden parties at the Railway Hotel, where, it sometimes seemed, he could learn more about the stage, its intrigues and its intricacies, than in the theatre itself.

And as far as he could tell by external manifestations, Herr Sparrgren had forgotten his very existence.

IV

WEEKS had passed. Three different plays were in rehearsal simultaneously. The opening performance was only a few days distant. The French farce was receiving its final polish in preparation for the dress rehearsal. They had arrived at the scene where the mother-in-law, played by Fru Karell, appeared on the stage dripping wet from head to foot, having just been fished out of the garden pond by four workmen. Keith had never been able to get the full meaning of this scene, because Fru Karell so far had entered by herself, merely bending her knees slightly to indicate a sitting position.

Now Herr Sparrgren suddenly brought the rehearsal to a full stop by clapping his hands together.

"We must have those four men and the arm chair in which they are to carry her," he cried. "Let me see . . . Carlsson is free . . . Herr Snellman, would you mind? And Palm . . . how about you? But there must be a fourth . . . oh, where is Wellander?"

"Here," cried Keith from the auditorium in a voice trembling with excitement.

"He smells a part," snickered old Eskilson, and even Herr Sparrgren had to smile.

"Oh, the first part!" sighed Fru Karell. "It's like first love."

"Come on, Wellander, and let's see what you can do," urged the director. And Keith rushed blindly to the stage to take up his position as one of the four supporters of the chair in which Fru Karell now rested

so limply that one could almost hear the water dripping from her dress.

"No," the director objected as Snellman and Carlsson took their places at the front legs of the chair, "put Wellander in front with Carlsson, and then we'll use a couple of stage hands behind them later on."

Carlsson turned almost black with rage, but Keith was in the seventh heaven and oblivious of anything but the task in hand.

"Remember that you are a little wet," cried Herr Sparrgren, "and that you want to make your burden appear as heavy as possible in order to get a larger tip."

Their entry was repeated six times before the director was satisfied at last. That evening Keith felt that the stage was less of a delusion than he had begun to think it.

V

THE first performance was under way. Keith came out with Carlsson and two other men after having deposited the dripping Fru Karell in the middle of the stage and having received a handful of metal discs from Linder, who played her son-in-law.

"That's nothing," said Keith triumphantly, his one regret being that the *pourboir* had passed into the hand of Carlsson, as the senior actor, and not into his own.

"Just wait and see," rejoined Carlsson darkly.

At that moment Fru Karell appeared, her face

still distorted by well simulated rage. But no sooner had the canvas doors closed behind her than her rage changed to a smile directed toward Keith.

"Were you afraid," she asked.

"Not a bit," Keith bragged. "And I don't think I ever will be."

"Then you'll never be an actor," Fru Karell retorted significantly.

Keith stared at her.

"Do you mean to say that it is necessary to be scared?"

"No," she said. "You'll get over that, too. But your first stage fright is your theatrical baptism. Until you have had it, the stage hasn't got you yet."

"I can't believe it," Keith declared stoutly.

"You wait and see," Fru Karell rejoined, her tone and words being almost identical with Carlsson's.

VI

BY degrees Keith shook down into the routine of his new life. He got parts of a kind . . . speaking parts even . . . waiters and valets and drivers and porters, who came in with a tray or a trunk, uttered a brief commonplace, and disappeared again.

Herr Snellman also used him a little more . . . but only to fetch and carry or, now and then, to borrow some required object from the local hotel or a friendly shopkeeper, who got a couple of free tickets in exchange.

They left Gefle and started northward to Östersund,

where Keith had his first glimpse of distant, snow-clad mountain peaks, and then in a wide sweep toward the coast and southward again.

Sometimes they stayed a whole week in the same place, and sometimes only a couple of days. Whichever was the case, the first duty on reaching a new town was to look up a furnished room. Most of Keith's colleagues had travelled for years from one end of Sweden to the other. In every city they knew of families who made a specialty of renting rooms to members of the theatrical profession, and who talked of that profession almost as if they belonged to it themselves. This was particularly the case with the women, and once in a while one of these really had been on the stage . . . always in a position of considerable importance, of course. It was from one of these retired but still worshipping devotees Keith first caught a phrase that was later repeated and confirmed by his comrades:

"He who has once breathed stage dust never gets it out of his nostrils."

Keith pondered, as his habit was. With most of the stage people he met, the theatre was a sort of religion to which they gave allegiance with a fatalism that never questioned the imperativeness of their service. But when you tried to get at the inward meaning of their devotion, they generally spoke of it as a vicious habit, like that of drinking or taking drugs, to which fate in an evil mood had made them addicted.

Both phases of their common attitude were equally puzzling to Keith. The stage interested him, and he burned to make a mark on it, but he had no difficulty in picturing himself differently occupied. Pretending

to be some one else seemed after all a rather childish game to him, though at times it was curiously fascinating. The position of Herr Sparrgren, on the other hand . . . directing, moulding, building . . . he could understand the lure of that work so much better.

VII

HIS life as a youth had first seemed like a prison out of which he was constantly trying to break . . . then like a quiet journey by easy stages through a flat and peaceful landscape . . . still later like an upward climb, toward a peak from which all the kingdoms of the earth were to be seen . . . and now. . . .

Now it was like a kaleidoscopic whirl through vaguely glimpsed cities that all resembled each other more or less. He was always on a train, it seemed . . . always hastening from one place to another . . . always packing or unpacking his two trunks . . . always taking possession of or deserting small and crowded and poorly lit dressingrooms . . . always seeing new faces and forgetting them again before they could assume the slightest degree of familiarity . . . always talking about performances that had failed or succeeded beyond expectation, of plays that were to be put on or taken off, of parts that might bring the long awaited chance of making good with the public, but that would probably go to some rival with a gift for intriguing . . . and so on.

He tried to keep a record of his constant comings

and goings, but it failed to make the thing real to him. Looking back at it afterward, he seemed to perceive not a continuous line of consciously directed activity, but a series of irrelevant and disconnected incidents, breaking like lightning flashes out of a floating mist of forgetfulness.

VIII

WHEREVER they went, the company as such was treated with the greatest respect, and so was Herr Sparrgren, whose personality Keith seemed to understand a little better after having at last seen him play Hamlet.

He was a man of many moods, each one of which appeared supremely valid to him while it lasted . . . a man of vast ambitions and much genuine ability . . . a man of still vaster uncertainties, whose likes and dislikes seemed as mysterious and unreasoned to Keith as the doings of life itself . . . a man of wonderful dreams and petty tempers, who might raise you to the heaven of his favour one day and fling you back into a hell of oblivion the next . . . a man in whom Keith sensed a force that he might worship and follow like a star, if only given a chance. . . .

But the chance never seemed to come. There was no hostility between the man at the top and the boy at the foot, but no connection either . . . just indifference . . . and to Keith this state of affairs was the more painful because of an underlying, never quite silenced desire to change it into something else.

IX

THE company included several young women whom Keith watched for a while with hopeful interest. They were not unattractive, but not one of them represented the chemical formula required to awaken Keith's dormant emotions. Ingeborg Olsson seemed most promising, but there was something angular and crude about her that repelled Keith's sensibilities. Nor was he important enough to tempt her into any serious campaign for his capture. And momentarily he did not care very much. The old longing was still stirring within him, but faintly for the time being. The fires that used to set his blood boiling were banked. His new life still possessed novelty enough to hold all but a very small part of his attention.

As for immorality. . . .

His mother was not the only one who had expressed a fear of its prevalence on the stage. It may even have figured in Keith's own mind as an additional attraction when he decided to cross to the supposedly less conventional side of the footlights. A little immorality, if suitably adorned, might have been welcomed by him. But if he had ever dreamed of finding it in the Sparrgren company, his disappointment could not have been more complete.

Marriage seemed to be the rule rather than an exception within the profession. Frequently both parties to such a union continued to act. There were at least three cases of it in the company, not counting the

director himself and his wife. Keith watched these couples with a mixture of hope and suspicion. Not a thing occurred to warrant either one of those feelings. Domesticity on the stage was, if anything, a little more domestic than elsewhere. Otherwise it could not be distinguished from the off-stage brand.

In fact, all the stage people, whether married or not, seemed to have a high regard for outward respectability, and as far as Keith was able to learn that first year, they lived up to their appearances.

Of course, there was a certain amount of talk, but it always concerned persons belonging to other companies.

X

IN spite of the essential conventionality of their private lives, the stage people almost unanimously proclaimed themselves Bohemians, while all outsiders not representing other art forms were summarily disposed of as Philistines. Between these two human genera a gulf was set. It could be crossed, but for good only in one direction. A Philistine might change his ways and graduate into a Bohemian, but the latter always remained a Bohemian, even when he abandoned the calling that had given him the title.

In the meantime neutral meeting grounds were not lacking, and the amount of intercourse was considerable. Each side seemed to need the other and resent it. Each side had something which the other lacked, and held itself the better one on that account. The Philistines possessed in particular what the Bohemians al-

ways ran short of, and therefore despised, namely money. The Philistines provided afternoon punch and gay suppers, and the Bohemians unhesitatingly partook of such hospitality without losing their sense of superiority. For the Bohemians had distinction and spirit. They entertained, too, but not by any vulgar outlay of cash, and they seemed always to move as on a platform . . . a little apart from the common herd, and above it. Their exceptional position was acceded by the Philistines, who nevertheless among themselves referred to their friends from the other side of the footlights as "mere mountebanks."

This state of affairs occupied Keith's mind a good deal. There was Carlsson, for instance, who used to be an ordinary "counter jumper," engaged in measuring out cotton goods to servant girls. In those days his Grecian face brought him nothing but an occasional cheap favour from some lass with whom he did not care to be seen in a public place. That had been his status up to a few years ago. Now he was more ironic than anybody else in his view of that Philistine world from which he had escaped so recently, and while his head had little more in it than when he was still handling the yardstick, his Grecian profile had become an "Open Sesame" to social circles that previously would no more have thought of admitting him than a street sweeper.

Keith observed and wondered . . . and out of his wonderment grew a conviction and a determination: he belonged by nature to the Bohemian side, and he meant to stay there. He was a newcomer on the stage, but he was there nevertheless, and should fate decree his ultimate removal from it, he would take

care to choose a new calling with a sufficient admixture of the artistic element.

It was his vanity that first produced this decision. Whatever else there might be to art, it surely gave its practitioners a place by themselves, and the very contempt with which they were regarded at times smacked strongly of envy. In other walks of life you had as a rule to achieve . . . or amass . . . greatly before your head became noticeable above those of your fellow workers, but the very novice received a certain share of distinction as soon as he took up one of the arts.

This conclusion on the part of Keith was the logical development of the first lesson he learned in his contact with the theatre . . . the lesson learned in that hotel garden where, on his third day as a member of the profession, he found himself included with the rest of his group as an object of public attention. There was a lot of snobbishness in the attitude resulting from that lesson, but as usual in the case of Keith, he could not rest satisfied for any length of time with mere appearances. If he found himself in the limelight by an accident, he felt at once obliged to do something that rendered his presence there warranted.

He began by conceiving the advantages of being taken for an artist. But it led him into endless speculations on the nature and purpose of art itself. The inevitable next step was to become an artist of some kind . . . not only in name, but in fact. And under this impulse Keith decided to resume the studies he had begun under the guidance of the kind-hearted Caroline Brinkman.

XI

AS far as appearances went, old Eskilson was the most disreputable member of the company, though he was one of the best paid. He lacked several front teeth, and his cynical grin merely made their absence more conspicuous when anybody suggested the services of a dentist. His clothing off the stage was as careless as it was correct on it. He hated shaving, and he felt happy as a boy if he could manage his make-up so as to postpone the agony of soap and razor for another day. He had three passions . . . sleeping, drinking and reading . . . and he indulged them with equal freedom subject to one restriction only: his duty as an actor. For his devotion to the stage was something more than a passion . . . a primitive instinct so compelling that it took unquestioned precedence of everything else . . . which did not prevent him from speaking of the stage as a dissolute mistress whom he served in shame and bitterness of spirit.

To this man Keith turned in his search for an instructor, having long scented unusual ability behind Eskilson's uncouth exterior, and having also noticed that Herr Sparrgren frequently acted on his advice after first ridiculing it.

An initial approach in the dressingroom brought Keith the requested permission to call at Eskilson's rooms next day. There he found him almost buried in a mixture of books, clothing of every kind, and tobacco ashes. The old man was puffing away furiously

at a long pipe and filling the room with fumes that set Keith coughing.

"Have you ever heard of Mark Twain," was Eskilson's astonishing greeting to his visitor.

"Yes," said Keith, "he's an American and he wrote 'Tom Sawyer.'"

"Hm!" grunted the other, still exhaling thick clouds of smoke. "Is that all of his you've read?"

"No," Keith replied with a sense of gratefulness to his father's hobby for books, though he could not see what the question had to do with his errand. "I have also read 'The Prince and the Pauper' and 'A Yankee at King Arthur's Court.'"

"Great . . . isn't it . . . all of it," Eskilson exploded. "He's the greatest writer alive. He's the one man who has got human nature straight and presents it without any humbug. Read him, my boy . . . all you can get of him. There is a new book of his being translated, and I am going to get it the moment it appears."

"Do you think reading him will help me on the stage," Keith inquired.

"Of course, it will," cried the man with the pipe. "Everything will . . . and nothing."

"Nothing," Keith echoed blankly.

"Actors are born, not made," said old Eskilson. "Are you sure you were born one?"

"I don't know," Keith admitted, "but I have made up my mind. . . ."

"We all do," Eskilson interrupted, "and that's what makes life so infernally funny to watch . . . it always goes the other way, you see."

"But work helps," Keith ventured.

"M-yes," the other one drawled, "but I don't think you like work any more than I do. I have kept an eye on you for some time, and like me, you have got too much brains to take naturally to the kind of slavery men call work. . . . However, that's no reason why we two shouldn't take a turn together at something that looks like work . . . when do you want to begin?"

That was going a little too fast for Keith, who had certain other considerations in mind.

"It depends on," he said. "I have no money. . . ."

"That's another resemblance between you and me," Eskilson grinned. "But why do you need it just now?"

"To pay . . ." Keith began, but checked himself.

"Me," roared Eskilson, puffing away like a locomotive. "Get to hell out of here . . . or rather, let your fool ideas go that way. What difference do you think it makes to me whether I spend an hour snoring or boozing or making you talk like a human being? Come up here tomorrow afternoon again, and we'll begin."

That was the start of a relationship which lasted several months and gave Keith a good deal more than ideas about enunciation and modulation. It lasted no longer than it did for two reasons . . . because of Eskilson's natural disinclination to regularity of hours and habits, and because, in his instruction, he was a classicist. On the stage he was a realist. But as a teacher he refused to deal with any subject but the proper training of the voice by the recital of poetry.

It bored Keith almost from the start, and if Eskilson's company had not been so tempting in other ways, he would probably have quit in a couple of weeks.

"What's the use," he cried one day when he had been subject to a more than usually severe gruelling over the rendition of a passage from a classic verse drama. "I want to play modern parts . . . it's the only thing that interests me . . . and nobody talks like that nowadays . . . if anybody ever did, for that matter."

"It's the only way," Eskilson declared dogmatically. "You must get complete control of your instrument in order to be able to use it properly for any purpose whatsoever. When you can read one of Hamlet's monologues properly, then you can also master the talk of a country lout."

"I don't believe it," Keith protested. "It's just like making us read Latin in school in order to prepare for the study of modern languages. It's plain humbug. . . ."

"Then all I've got to give you, my boy, is humbug," said Eskilson emphatically, but without resentment. "And I was right in my first estimate of you, when I said that you don't like hard work any more than I do."

"But I do," cried Keith in despair. "I can work as hard as anybody . . . when something takes hold of me and I really believe in it. . . ."

"Oh," retorted Eskilson with another grin, "that's not work, but play . . . and what you say makes me more sure than ever that you were not born to be an actor. There's only one thing that keeps me from making that verdict final."

"What's that," Keith demanded eagerly.

"You can make up. I have watched you . . . and you have got the right idea about the use of paints.

Suppose we drop this reading business and talk make-up instead?"

Keith was ready. Eskilson had hit it right. The task of making up interested Keith more than any other feature of his work. He loved to turn his own bright-eyed, boyish face with its mop of light hair into that of a wrinkled and hollow-eyed old man, a red-nosed drunkard, or a sleek, bewhiskered butler. Even Herr Sparrgren admitted a certain excellence on his part in that field, and it helped largely to make his connection with the stage last as long as it did.

XII

HERR SPARRGREN'S recognition of this facility brought Keith the first part that seemed to have possibilities. It was small enough, heaven knows . . . a collector of bills appearing in a single scene and speaking a dozen lines. But the figure lent itself to caricature.

Linder played the principal part, a middle-aged professor of irascible temper, and the collector came to dun him for a bill incurred by his prospective and much disliked son-in-law. The bill, of course, drove the professor into a rage. The scene capped a crescendo in a piece of acting carried out with almost American speed and vigour. To furnish the intended climax, it should be played *furiosamente* and, above all, *con amore,* not only by Linder, but by Keith as well.

Intellectually Keith saw the possibilities of the part. He could imagine a dozen different types . . . bullies, sneaks, cowards, cynics, blunderers, and so on . .

all of whom would meet the requirements of the occasion. He mouthed each scant line in an endless number of ways. He tried every conceivable mood that might induce in himself the proper physical and emotional reaction. All in vain.

Perhaps some sub-conscious resistance, connected with his father's position, created the inhibition that reduced Keith to a state bordering on imbecility as soon as he found himself alone on the stage with Linder. The latter was plainly made nervous by a manner that quite failed to produce the expected spring-board for his own burst of temper, and his nervousness in turn reacted on Keith.

The situation was bad enough at the rehearsals, during which Herr Sparrgren finally grew almost as nervous as the two persons immediately concerned. The presence of the public made it ever so much worse. The scene marked a distinct drop in the movement of the play, and no effort on the part of Linder could counteract the deadening influence of Keith's failure.

Matters came to a head at the fifth performance. Keith was more embarrassed and ineffective than ever. Some of his lines were spoken in a tone so low that they could not be heard across the footlights. Linder's rising temper was evidently genuine. At last it boiled over, and suddenly Keith found himself grabbed by the shoulders and literally kicked off the stage with such violence that the canvas walls of the professor's study nearly made him company. The whole thing happened so quickly and unexpectedly that resistance was out of the question. Keith might as well have tried to foresee and forestall an earthquake.

Flung out in that headlong fashion, Keith reeled

and fell. A number of his colleagues came rushing to the spot, while from the other side of the shaking canvas structure the public could be heard screaming and clapping in a fury of delight. Before Keith had time to get on his feet again, Linder emerged. He was still in a rage that bore no trace of simulation. Nothing would satisfy him but to finish then and there the physical action begun under the eyes of the audience. Others intervened and had to hold him back with force.

"Let me go," Linder hissed, careful in spite of his temper not to let himself become audible outside. "He did it on purpose . . . to spoil my scene. . . . I'll throw him out of the theatre. . . ."

That charge of malicious intention was the last straw as far as Keith was concerned. Until then he had been too conscious of his own responsibility in the matter to get up the degree of resentment warranted by Linder's assault. Now he began to see red, too, and for a while it looked as if the play would come to a stop while two of its characters settled their differences by a fist fight.

In spite of his precarious temper, Linder came first to his senses, helped by his training and greater experience. The moment he calmed down, Keith pulled himself together and walked off. Fortunately he was through for the evening, and still more fortunately Herr Sparrgren was not in the theatre at the time.

But a report was made to him, and both offenders were summoned before him. Linder was severely censured, while Keith discovered himself within an inch of dismissal. Just what kept the director from going to that length remained a mystery, but Keith

guessed that there was no love lost between Herr Sparrgren, who was very jealous of his authority, and Linder, whose almost megalomaniac view of himself made him particularly sensitive to any outward restraint. In the end Keith was ordered to apologize to the man who had assaulted him.

For a moment it seemed as if the floor was rocking under him. He felt very faint . . . too faint for immediate action, and yet such action was required of him. There was only one choice open to him . . . he must resign from the Sparrgren company at once.

Then his brain began to operate with surprising clearness. His whole situation passed in review before his mind's eye . . . the utter hopelessness of it if he broke away from his all too slender connection with the stage. He thought and thought . . . for hours, it seemed, though it could not have lasted more than a few seconds. But no other way could be found than the one indicated by the director.

"All right," Keith said finally, turning toward his antagonist with a movement that might have qualified him for a puppet show. "I know that I am rotten in this part, and that this makes it hard for you . . . and for that I apologize . . . and I can understand what you did . . . but you have no right to say that I did anything on purpose to hurt you. . . ."

"But you did," Linder broke in, still nourishing his grievance.

A gurgling sound came from Keith's throat. His brown eyes took fire. His hands closed and opened spasmodically. There was something about his appearance that gave pause even to Linder.

"All right," the latter said with a quick change of tone, though still with a trace of sulkiness. "I'll take your word for it."

Then both got a lecture from Herr Sparrgren on the sacredness of the cause they were serving, and their duty to subordinate all individual considerations to it. Linder fidgeted. Keith listened with increasing attention and respect. The words he heard were not those of a disciplinarian, but of a devout high-priest. For the first time, perhaps, Keith got a convincing glimpse of the ideals underlying and inspiring the theatrical profession. It was a religion of beauty and of service he heard preached, and under the spell of it he became as wax in the hands of the preacher.

No one can tell what the outcome might have been if Herr Sparrgren had seen and understood what went on in the heart of the youngster watching him with open lips and eyes that now burned with quite a different sort of fire. But he couldn't or wouldn't. With an abrupt change of tone, he dropped into his ordinary fatigued mannerism as he said:

"What I have just said was meant for both of you, but I fear it was largely wasted on Herr Wellander. Watching you lately, I have begun to swing back to my original theory that no one is fitted for the stage who has not an ear for music. However, I shall give you a few more chances."

Keith left in a state of mind so mixed that it would have taken omniscience to sort out all the component thoughts and moods. Herr Sparrgren had given him a new view of art that could never be forgotten again. At the same time, however, the director had appeared unforgivably lacking in what Keith might have de-

scribed as sympathetic discernment, had he been able to analyse it at all. And the final outcome of the incident was the planting in Keith's mind of a resentment that could easily spread from the personal cause of it to the stage life itself.

"Why should I have to apologize," Keith demanded indignantly of Eskilson when they happened to be alone in the dressingroom that night.

"For two reasons, my boy," Eskilson replied with a toothless grin. "First, because you have no right at all on the stage unless you make good. And secondly, because when two rights clash in the theatre, the one backed by the bigger reputation always wins."

"That's abominable," Keith exclaimed.

"Perhaps," Eskilson admitted placidly. "But do you think the rest of the world is much different from the stage?"

XIII

THE trouble with Linder had blown over. Linder and Keith had shaken hands. Everybody else seemed to have forgotten the unpleasant incident. But one person had not. That was Herr Snellman, the stage manager, whose martinet soul could not forgive Linder for having dared to deviate from the action prescribed by the text as interpreted by Herr Sparrgren. Being powerless against the offender, he tried to get even by suddenly taking Keith into his favour.

Keith was pleased, but also annoyed and disturbed. Herr Snellman's favours generally took the form of

a demand for work. Such was the case now. He opened up the little world which he had kept jealously guarded from Keith so far, going even to the extent of letting the latter study his stage diagrams and property lists. In return he demanded that Keith should give the better part of his attention and almost all his time to this side of his work.

Keith delighted in being introduced to the mechanical side of the stage management. Getting access to a new set of problems was a challenge to which he never failed to respond. But it had drawbacks, and these became evident at once. So far the requirement that he attend all performances from start to finish had been a dead letter. Now he was compelled to turn up an hour ahead of the rest in order to assist Herr Snellman in setting the stage for the evening's performance. No matter what his part in the play might demand, he was expected to give a hand between acts, and often he had to work so hard that his make-up was seriously impaired by perspiration before he had a chance to appear on the stage. This was what bothered him most.

It was all right, however, as long as the novelty lasted. But the moment came, and very soon, when he could set the stage for any modern play on their repertory without consulting the written records . . . when he knew as well as Herr Snellman every piece of property carried and what they had to borrow on reaching a new city . . . when, in fact, he could take the place of Herr Snellman as far as the running of the whole line of modern plays already on the program was concerned. Then he found that it was an-

other case of Herr Brockhaus' stock of buttons and ribbons. Once he had mastered the routine involved, there was nothing to do but to keep it going mechanically from day to day. Changes were out of the question. Suggestions for improvements were frowned on, if not actually resented. No part was granted him in the constructive work of staging new plays. No initiative was expected of him, and if shown, it was promptly suppressed. Herr Snellman wanted him merely to be an efficient tool, to be used at will, and that was the last part for which Keith was fitted.

Soon he and Herr Snellman were pulling in different directions, Keith trying to guard his chances for acting, and the other one trying to prove that it did not matter as he was no actor anyhow. When Keith resorted to passive resistance, Herr Snellman became sarcastic, and it was only a question of time when his sarcasm would change into open hostility. An explosion was plainly in sight, and as the time was also approaching when all contracts were to be arranged for the next season, Keith had good reason to be worried. An accident saved him.

They were playing the first three nights of the week in the little city of Wexiö. "Hamlet" was on the program for Wednesday night. At seven o'clock on Thursday morning they were to take the train for Kalmar, where they were to open that same evening with a modern drama. Keith, who held the parts of Bernardo and Ostric, was able to leave comparatively early on Wednesday night in order to get a good night's rest. He was eating supper with some of his comrades, when the costumer appeared out of breath

and asked him to come back to the theatre at once.

"The stage hands have struck," he explained and was off again.

Keith gasped. He had learned enough by that time to know what was involved. It was then a quarter of midnight, and he failed to see how they could possibly get everything ready to leave at seven in the morning. Grabbing his overcoat, he started on the run for the theatre, where he soon learned the full extent of the trouble . . . a dispute about wages which had caused the workers to leave in a body, feeling sure, as they did, of having the visitors in the hollow of their hands.

"But I'll do it all myself and reach Kalmar by midsummer rather than give in to those blood-suckers," cried the black-bearded little stage manager, literally dancing with anger and excitement. "Come on, Wellander . . . let's show them!"

The ethics of strikes and strike-breaking were quite foreign to Keith in those days. That side of it never even occurred to him. His organization had been put in a hole, and it was up to him to help pull it out. It was an emergency . . . both great and unusual . . . and as such it fired his imagination.

"Seven hours," he yelled. "Let's show them we don't need them."

They were four . . . Snellman, Palm, Keith and the costumer. The latter, however, would be fully occupied in his own department. Fortunately they had brought only what scenery and property was needed for their three performances in that place . . . but that was enough. There were seven or eight large back drops to be lowered, rolled and trucked to the

station . . . with only three men to do a work generally done by eight or nine.

Keith and Palm climbed to the dim regions above the stage. The lights had been turned off by the strikers, and they had only a few kerosene lamps to guide their work. Not even lanterns were to be had.

Lying flat on their stomachs on the narrow boards with slits between them that formed the only flooring up there, Keith and Palm unfastened one drop after another and lowered it slowly, hand over hand, the weight of the thing nearly pulling their arms off . . . while down below Herr Snellman received the drops and pulled them toward the footlights until they lay flat on the stage.

In the midst of this work an awkward movement by Keith upset the open lamp beside him. The oil flowed out and began dripping down to the stage. In another moment the oil would be on fire, and then. . . .

Keith did not realize all the possibilities of that accident until it was well over. Momentarily he considered only the damage threatening the drops. Without thinking of anything else, he managed to extinguish the lamp as well as a few flickering blue flamelets that had just begun to appear outside of it. After that they had to work under the added handicap of darkness until the last huge piece of canvas had been lowered, and they could climb down to safety and other work.

The scene while he was lying up there became graved on his brain, never to be forgotten . . . that gigantic, yawning chasm, full of weird shadows as of grotesque monsters hovering about the faint, foggy light of the

lamps . . . and at the bottom of that chasm, vaguely seen, little Snellman tugging at those huge smeared surfaces and looking like some dwarfish, black-bearded gnome . . . and out of the darkness in which they were lost, the strained voice of Palm reiterating eternally: "Leggo now . . . steady . . . leggo again."

Those three men then rolled the drops and carried them to the single truck outside. When this was full, they escorted it to the freight yards where a car was waiting for them. Each moment they were prepared to be stopped by a hooting and stone-throwing gang of strikers. But nothing happened. One trip after another was made in safety between the theatre and the freight car. The drops were followed by other scenery, and this in turn by huge boxes full of costumes and other paraphernalia.

At twenty minutes of seven the car was full and the theatre clear. Then Keith made a wild dash for his rooms, thanking his stars that, for once, he had left his trunks with the company baggage. All he had with him was a small handbag, that could be packed in a minute. His bill paid, he started once more on the run for the depot. A single minute before the train left, he pulled himself on board the special car reserved for the company, out of breath, exhausted and dopey for lack of sleep, but happy nevertheless.

It was a great achievement, and Keith was the hero of the occasion. He had proved his mettle in a way that Herr Snellman could appreciate. So could Herr Sparrgren, who had remained ignorant of the situation until he reached the train in the morning, and who nearly fainted when he heard of what had happened. To him much more than money was involved. A fail-

ıre to open in the next city at the set hour would have ıffected his honour, and that dread possibility had been ıverted through the assistance of Keith.

A few days later Keith's contract was renewed for the next season on the same terms as before. And ıfter that Herr Snellman avoided calling on him for ıelp whenever he had a part of any significance whatever.

The incident was still fresh in every mind when Keith one day suddenly stopped in the midst of a sentence and turned to Palm:

"Supposing that oil had got on fire. . . ."

"Well," Palm answered philosophically. "Then we wouldn't be worrying about it now."

XIV

EVERY actor, no matter what may be his natural gifts or failings, hides in some obscure recess of his soul a hankering to appear young and handsome on the stage.

Keith did best with old men and grotesque figures of every kind. He enjoyed impersonating such characters as Molvik in Ibsen's "The Wild Duck," and he felt rather elated when his performance of it caused a newspaper critic to declare that "while the text indicated that the theological student was drunk, it did not require him to have *delirium tremens*." Yet he was secretly yearning for a chance to impress the public with his looks as well as with his versatility. And for this reason he felt more keenly the handicaps at-

tached to certain parts that otherwise might have assuaged his craving.

There was that of Sune, for instance, the lovelorn young page in Frans Hedberg's "The Wedding at Ulfvåsa," which represented the most exacting task entrusted to him thus far, and which contained a monologue that left him in undisputed possession of the stage for many minutes. But Sune had to sigh out his sentimental longings and misgivings at a window from which he was watching the approach of a bridal procession with a band at its head.

This fact might not have counted as heavily as it did, had the music come from behind the stage, as directed by the playwright, and had it been played very softly to indicate distance, as directed by the composer. But the local orchestras had an unconquerable aversion to leaving their accustomed seats between the public and the footlights, and they didn't feel at their best until they could blare out the stirring strains of the well-known march *forte fortissimo*. And so poor Sune had to roar out his tender commonplaces in the very teeth of a musical tempest, with next to no chance of their ever reaching any ears but his own. It was heart-breaking, but when he appealed to Herr Sparrgren and Herr Snellman, those authorities, severally and in common, protested their total helplessness in the face of established local customs. The public wanted to see the music, and the music wanted to be seen by the public, and as for Sune . . . well, no one seemed to care whether he was heard or not.

Perhaps it was the Wexiö incident that brought Keith another chance much more suited to his desire

. . . a young boy in the earliest version of Björnson's "A Gauntlet": the very play that had figured so fatally in Keith's relations to Lisa. He had to be young . . . very young, in fact . . . a little foppish, vivacious, flirtatious, and all that was attractive. He came on the stage in a rush, surrounded by a bevy of teasing but nevertheless admiring young ladies. After a few bright and playful remarks, he had to sit down at the piano to hammer out a merry dance tune, while his female escort fluttered about him like white butterflies.

Keith was so impressed by this part that he ordered himself a light-coloured suit for use in it . . . the first he had ever owned . . . and it was a dream. It fitted a little tightly, to be sure, and seemed to hamper his movements somewhat, but already he saw himself as a rival of Herr Sandberg.

The rehearsals promised well, too. Herr Sparrgren nagged him mercilessly, which was always taken as a sign of interest on his part. At last the great evening came . . . the eagerly awaited first performance . . . with a more than usually notable audience to witness it. Keith was ready for his entrance at the beginning of the second act, with five whiteclad specimens of female loveliness waiting around him in different states of nervous excitement. To reach the stage, they had to mount two rather tall steps, Keith leading.

These steps were new to Keith, and feeling a little stiff in his new suit, he decided to try them out before the curtain went up. The moment he raised his right foot to the lowest step, a tearing sound was heard

from somewhere below . . . Keith put down his foot again and examined. . . . A titter was heard from behind . . .

What he discovered exceeded his worst expectations. His new trousers had split where the strain was greatest . . . split along a length of nearly two feet . . . there could be no doubt about its being visible to any one who cared to see . . .

At that moment sounded the gong by which Herr Sparrgren liked to signalize the rise of the curtain.

"Stop it, stop it!" cried Keith in an agony of embarrassment and fear.

"We can't," shouted Herr Snellman inexorably. "We're already behind."

"But my trousers . . ." Keith pleaded almost in tears.

"They're on as far as I can see," Herr Sparrgren interceded with mixed impatience and amusement. "Get on now, Wellander . . . the curtain is already up. . . ."

"For heaven's sake, hurry!" he added angrily as Keith still hesitated. "The stage is empty, and everything is waiting for you."

Fortunately a high-backed chair stood near the door through which Keith and his whiteclad train came pouring in, and for that chair he made a dive. There he stood ensconced until he had to transfer his activity to the piano. Then he dragged the chair along with him half the way and covered the rest in another wild leap.

The girls might frisk as much as they pleased. He could not. They might be vivaciously playful in their remarks. He had to think of his trousers . . . and

of course, his lines suffered accordingly. How he got off the stage finally, he never knew. It was one of those things that his memory refused to retain.

Before the play was put on for a second performance, Herr Sparrgren decided to cut out the whole scene with Keith and the girls, thus anticipating the amputation subsequently performed by the playwright himself.

When Keith reached the dressingroom that first night, he found old Eskilson reading a book that kept him in a state of uproarious hilarity.

"Oh, please," Keith begged, stung to the quick by a mirth which at first he connected with his own misfortune.

"What's the matter," Eskilson asked, noticing him for the first time.

Keith told, ending his sad story by saying that now he could understand what his father meant when he used to talk about being "born under the Monkey Star."

"Listen to this," cried Eskilson as if he had not heard a word of Keith's misadventure. And he began to read from the book in his hand . . . a strange tale about a nigger boy and a white boy floating down the Mississippi on a raft and falling in with two tramps. Keith had to listen against his will.

"What is it," he inquired after a while.

"Mark Twain," Eskilson jerked out, unwilling to stop. "The new book . . . 'Huckleberry Finn' it's called, and it beats anything he ever did before. . . . Listen!"

He read on, and Keith listened without even remembering to take off that fatal pair of new trousers.

Others came in, dropped onto their chairs and listened! At times Eskilson laughed so that his reading became almost unintelligible. But the trend of the story was caught, and soon the others joined him. The long and narrow room, with its row of gas jets surrounded by wire netting, shook with the laughter of those men to whom America and Mark Twain were mere names.

"That's humour," said Eskilson emphatically as he had to close the book at last. "And that is what I fear you lack most of all, Keith."

XV

THEY were in Malmö, the principal city of southern Sweden, with traditions more Danish than Swedish. From the end of the long mole guarding the harbour, the spires of Copenhagen were faintly discernible on very clear days. The sight of them filled him with a new longing to get out of his own country. Merely to put his foot on foreign soil would be an adventure. And beyond Copenhagen lay Europe, the rest of the world. . . .

The proximity of Denmark frequently coloured their discussions when the members of the company came together over a glass of punch after the day's performance. All spoke of Copenhagen with a gleam in their eyes and a softer tone in their voices. It was a city of joy and feasting, of pretty women not too chary of their favours, of a free, less restricted life, of jests and quips and pranks. But as for the Danes . . . in the bulk at least, if not individually. . . .

Then all the wars of the schoolbooks were fought

over again . . . those long, costly struggles in which Sweden always won because Sweden always was right, while to its Ormuzd the smaller but richer Denmark played a despicable Ahriman.

Keith listened and wondered. . . .

The old schoolbooks had lost their hold on him. He found it hard to think of any other nation as innately hostile and inferior to his own. He could not argue very much or very well about it. Reason did not seem to have much to do with it. It was a feeling.

Standing on the mole, with his glance turned toward those barely visible dots across the Sound which he knew to be the spires of Copenhagen, he wondered if he, perhaps, had been born "a man without a country," or if, instead, all countries were equally "his own."

It seemed just then as if always, as far back as he could recall, he had been cosmopolitan in his thoughts and feelings . . . as much interested in other peoples and countries and literatures as in his own . . . as ready to find a brother in a Dane, or a Frenchman, or even a Russian, as in a Swede. . . .

His mind turned back to the evening when he listened spellbound to the stories told by Björnson about Lincoln and the great country where everybody was as good as everybody else, and where all work was held equally honest and respectable. That memory became blended with what he had recently heard old Eskilson read about Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn and the marvellous Mississippi.

They could work out there, and they could loaf. They were in deadly earnest about life, and yet they had humour. . . .

And he, Keith, who couldn't work . . . or at least not to any purpose . . . and who had no real sense of humour, it seemed . . . perhaps if. . . .

He never seemed able to quite finish that line of speculation, but his mind returned to it time and again.

XVI

THE chief event of their Malmö season was the première of Shakespeare's "The Winter's Tale," on which the company had been hard at work for some time, every member being engaged in the cast. Keith played Dion, one of the four Lords of Sicily attendant on Leontes, impersonated by Herr Sparrgren himself. It was quite a part . . . for Keith . . . but the blank verse and the poetic inversions of the language troubled him. It seemed so hopelessly unnatural. He tried to project himself into those distant ages, but nothing could make him believe that human beings ever spoke in such a manner.

The dress rehearsal was reached at last. The costumes were Greek and very scant. Keith had on little more than a white blouse and a pair of tights. To save expense, the theatre had not been heated. The spring was near, but the cold was still sharp. Everybody shivered.

The first public performance followed two days later. Keith barely managed to reach the theatre that evening. His head was like lead, without a clear thought in it. One moment he was on fire, the next his teeth clattered like castenets. He found it hard

o stand on his feet. Everybody could see that he was ll.

"What happens if I can't go on," Keith muttered.

"No performance," snapped Sandberg, who played nother courtier, "and the house is sold out."

"You must go on," said old Eskilson. "Send for quart of the strongest and best old Sherry you can get."

So Keith did. A glass of it restored him wonderfully. Two had a miraculous effect on his mind as on his body. After that he took a full glass every time he came off the stage . . . and his exits and entrances were numerous. When the play ended, the bottle was gone, too. Keith felt as sober as if he had been drinking as much water.

He had done well. Even Herr Sparrgren nodded approval as he caught sight of Keith when leaving the theatre.

The next day Keith was in bed, but the crisis had passed, and a couple of days later he was on his feet again. The second performance of the same play took place a week after the first. Keith looked forward to it not only with confidence, but with pleasant expectations.

Everything went well until the scene when the courtiers are pleading with the King. Sandberg had the principal speeches, but there was a good deal left for Keith to say.

In the midst of his longest speech his mind suddenly became a blank. Dark spots floated before his eyes . . . an endless line of them. Everything grew very silent about him.

He heard Herr Sparrgren whisper intently to him.

He saw Sandberg formulating words with his lips.

Keith stook like a statue, merely staring at them.

A moment later Herr Sparrgren was speaking toward the public again. Sandberg bowed deep and retired. Keith followed him automatically. The moment he was outside, he became conscious of all that had happened.

"My God!" he exclaimed. "What is the director going to say?"

Herr Sparrgren issued from the stage just then and went over to Keith at once.

"I guess I must still be sick," Keith ventured.

Herr Sparrgren shook his head as he took in Keith with a glance that was searching but in no manner menacing.

"No," he said finally. "You have just had the fright which you staved off the other night when you were sick. I fear you will have a hard time of it for a while."

And the director's prophecy proved correct. Keith learned at last what stage fright meant, and learned it abundantly. It was a nightmare that hounded him whenever he approached the stage. It was no longer a question of creating a part, but of remembering his lines. It affected him most when they played "The Winter's Tale," but the spectre of fear . . . the crushing fear of finding himself stared at by hundreds of eyes while his mind refused to hand out a single word for utterance . . . pursued him in other plays as well.

It seemed unbearable. Then he recalled the words of Fru Karell. Perhaps it was merely a beginning;

. . . a new birth, painful but wholesome, out of which the real actor would finally emerge.

XVII

THIS extreme state of mind lasted only a few weeks, but it left behind a sort of numbness that robbed his acting of any life it might have had before. He had never felt quite at home on the stage. Now he felt a complete stranger on it. To get relief, he turned more and more to such pleasure as could be had apart from his work. He drank a good deal when opportunity offered itself . . . not because the drink itself tempted him, but for the sake of the life that went with it. His own temperament was too nervous, too mercurial, to require much artificial stimulation. But most of the people with whom he came in contact were slow and dull and boresome until aroused by the fumes of alcohol. Inhibitions were removed. Tongues were loosened. Slumbering ambitions stirred. Personalities which long ago had slumped down into a safe rut, recovered some of their lost sense of power and attempted to soar freely once more. Dust-covered and forgotten ideals were brought out and furbished up and offered as bran new.

Keith did not quite escape the delusive power that lay hidden in the bottle. He, too, wanted above all the sense of living fully and intensely and effectively. During the long workday, at rehearsals and performances, he lacked that sense utterly. But at night, in

a restaurant full of gay people, where the air vibrated with music and eagerly competing voices, there, among a group of comrades set free like himself from the paralysing spell of routine, he felt once more that there was virtue in himself, and that life was worth living.

Two or three times he went too far and lost control of his faculties. He found that it was not a very serious matter, as he never became quarrelsome or obtrusive in any way, and as his associates regarded lapses of that kind with the greatest leniency. But he detested the very idea of not being in full command of himself, and having learned his lesson, he took good care after that to stop in time.

"I almost think you make a mistake," grinned old Eskilson at him one "day after." "You are the funniest man I have ever seen with a jag on . . . or perhaps I should say that you are the least funny, because the more you get, the more orderly you become. If *in vino veritas* be true, I fear there must be an old maid buried within you, Keith."

"I don't like old maids," rejoined Keith . . . and then he laughed at his own lack of humour.

XVIII

A CERTAIN deterioration seemed to have come into the work of the company as a whole. They had been hard at it to build up a sufficiently large and varied repertory, representative of every literature and every dramatic form. A Shakespearian tragedy might be followed by a German *Posse* . . . an Ibsen drama by a politely sug-

gestive French comedy. Everybody was tired, and Herr Sparrgren no less than the rest.

He had to act the part of Hamlet at least once in every place they visited . . . because the public demanded it, he explained with a wry face . . . because he couldn't keep away from it, the actors suggested maliciously. But whatever his motive, it was plain that the monotony of repetition lay heavily upon him. To get the relief of variation, he changed his manner, his costumes, and even the colour and cut of his wigs. One evening he appeared with his head surrounded by an aura of brightest red. The audience gasped. The actors and actresses snickered. Thus two acts went by, a general collapse seeming imminent. Before the curtain rose on the third act, Hamlet-Sparrgren flung the offending wig in the face of his patient dressingroom attendant and walked on the stage with his natural crop of black hair uncovered.

Herr Snellman's little personal peculiarities did much to promote the confusion that was in the air. He would, for instance, never carry a base drum or a bugle among the other properties, although the company was remarkably self-sufficient in that respect, carrying not only its own scenery, but most of the furniture required by the modern plays. Musical instruments, Herr Snellman contended, could and should be furnished by the local orchestra. The fact that such orchestras often consisted only of a violinist supported by a man at the piano did not faze him. Consequently those taking part in the closing scenes of "Hamlet" never knew in advance what kind of sounds would take the place of the shots supposed to herald the advent of Young Fortinbras.

The climax came one night when, in one of the smallest towns along their route, Herr Snellman had another quarrel with the local musicians about the prices to be paid for their services. They did as the workmen at Wexiö . . . struck. The town was too small to have a music store of its own. Not a bugle or a drum could be scared up. The flourishes that punctuate the early part of the play were supplanted by cheers outside, given by Herr Snellman himself, Keith and Palm. As usual, the stage manager had warned no one about the substitutes devised by his own ingenuity. And so everybody was taken by surprise . . . in spite of what had preceded . . . when, instead of the shots due in the final scene, there was heard a violent beating of the gong used to send up the curtain. Herr Sparrgren, who prided himself on his ability to meet any exigency that might rise, improvised a new line as substitute for his prescribed inquiry about the "warlike noise" outside:

"Who is 't that rings thusway?"

Some said afterward that he was trapped by his own pride. Others insisted that he knew what he did and did it ironically as a means of relieving his own pent-up feelings. At any rate, the immediate effect on the company was disastrous. Eskilson and Sandberg, both lying dead on the stage in the shapes of the King and Laertes, began to laugh until their supposed corpses literally shook. So did the supporting courtiers. Horatio-Linder nearly bit off his lower lip, being particularly exposed to public view. Keith as Osric came on the stage sputtering and got all his consonants misplaced in announcing the coming of

Fortinbras. It was a scandal . . . but the public seemed to notice nothing. The closing salvos of applause were as cordial and persistent as ever. The newspaper eulogies the next day rose to the expected heights. Herr Sparrgren shrugged his shoulders and smiled his most fatigued smile.

"Why," he asked, "should you insist on having your pearls perfect?"

The summer was near, however. A change was at hand, although the company was to go right on playing through the warm season. At the end of the regular season, several members left while others appeared to take their places. Keith received leave of absence to perform the second term of his military service, which he had succeeded in postponing for a year. On rejoining the company in Christiania, where the whole summer was spent, he found its entire spirit changed. They were then playing an Offenbach operetta, and even Keith had to try his lack of voice as a member of the chorus.

"We'll be running a circus and a menagerie next," sneered old Eskilson.

"Well, it's good for our sense of humour," Keith got back at him.

XIX

THE first thing Keith heard on reaching Christiania was that "Bob" Ekman was coming. The exciting quality of that news did not depend on the young man himself, as he was quite

unknown to everybody, but on his being a favourite cousin of one of the best known actresses in Sweden . . . one on whom royalty itself was said to have looked with more than ordinary grace. Another cause of the general curiosity about young Ekman was that he had spent several years in America, where his original Swedish Robert had been abbreviated to suit the Transatlantic habit of time-saving. Now he was Bob to all the world.

He proved to be a very jolly and companionable young fellow, a little short of stature, but with plenty of good looks, and a charm and ease of manner that won him general favour at once. All the men liked him. The women more than liked him. Everybody wanted to be friends with him . . . and his way was not made harder by the presence back of him of that great actress whose influence was supposed to have got him his job with Herr Sparrgren.

For Bob had never acted in Sweden. Even his American stage experiences had been limited to a place in the chorus of a famous musical comedy, where, however, he was said to have won favours with the female star quite disproportionate to his professional position.

In the universal competition for Bob's attention, Keith did not seem to have a single chance. Nor did he try to win what appeared so completely beyond his reach. Yet it happened little by little, each step to it being almost imperceptible, that Bob and Keith became particular chums. Perhaps the cause lay in the completeness of Keith's surrender, or in his inability to consider himself a rival of Bob on the stage or off it, or in the fact that he proved more eager

than any other member of the company, male or female, to hear about America.

Bob made no bones about his career out there. It had not been a waltz on roses. He had starved at times. He had tried many trades. Most of the time he had worked as night clerk in a hotel. The job was not a bad one, he said. But he possessed a neat little voice and liked to use it. And he was crazy about the stage ever since his cousin scored her first sensational success. His theatrical career began with amateur performances among his Swedish-American countrymen. Gradually these grew in pretentiousness. Encouraged by those successes, Bob tried for the professional stage and landed, as already recorded, in the gay chorus of "The Four Thieves," where he was discovered by the erratically famous Corinne Cary. When he had reached that far, his great cousin thought it time for him to return to his native country.

"But I think I'll go back to America," Bob said. "Of course, I think I can make good on the Swedish stage beyond all I can hope for out there. But there are other things to be considered . . . the women . . . such women . . . none like them over here . . . although . . ."

And Bob's voice might trail off into a mere whisper, and his eyes would stray across the restaurant where they were sitting to some good-looking woman, who generally responded quickly to the magnetic influence of that glance, and perhaps he would part company with Keith for a while. But a report was always rendered to the latter afterward. That was one of the foundations of their friendship. Bob would do outrageous things, and then he would come to Keith

for confession, admitting frankly what an incurable scamp and rogue he was as soon as women were concerned.

Keith would listen with wide-open eyes, incredulous at first, but gradually convinced that Bob never told anything but the truth. And as a rule Keith would be led sooner or later to exclaim:

"How in the world do you do it, Bob?"

"I don't do anything at all," Bob replied modestly. "I just look at them, and they do the rest."

The atmosphere within the company was changed in more respects than one. Love intrigues, so completely lacking during the previous season, were now the order of the day. Bob was the centre of most of them, but his spirit seemed to infect the other men. And as for the women . . .

"I think they are a lot of fools," cried Keith one day, looking at Bob with fond reproof in his glance. "There is only one worse fool than the lot of them . . . and that's yourself. . . ."

"I know it," Bob admitted. "But I can't help it. I was born that way. And they never let me alone. There isn't one among them that doesn't try to catch me."

"Not one," Keith repeated unbelievingly.

"Not one," asserted Bob. "There are some that I carefully avoid, but this is no contradiction of what I just said. And all of them have charms . . . charms of some kind . . . and they are so different . . . and so alike beneath their differences. . . . It's a great game, I tell you . . . although I wish I could play it without having to hurt so many . . ."

"Well, I shouldn't care to be in your place," Keith

remarked pensively. "But I wish fortune would not be quite so one-sided."

"Oh, your case is hopeless," Bob said in his most placid manner. "You don't know the game, and you never will. First, you don't take it seriously enough, and then you take it too seriously by far. It isn't a game with you, and they can feel it at once."

"Yes," Keith agreed ruefully, "Eskilson was right in saying that I have no sense of humour. But for all that I can see the joke that will be played on you some day."

"Perhaps," laughed Bob. "But why worry about the future . . . this evening I have a date with Fröken Finnström. . . ."

"Good heavens!" Keith cried. "You don't mean it? That pious old hen . . . she always reminds me of Dickens' Uriah Heep. . . . Oh, you *are* crazy!"

"All the rest have other engagements," Bob explained with a characteristic shrug of his exceedingly well groomed shoulders. "And old Finnström has points of her own . . . like all of them . . . so why should I be unkind to her when there is no one else in sight?"

XX

SELMA SCHEFFER was the principal addition on the female side. She came with a reputation made almost exclusively in Stockholm, and mostly at the Royal Theatre. She had begun her stage career while a mere slip of a girl and had played her first leading part while still in her teens. Though

not yet thirty, she was held one of the foremost actresses in the country, and her temper was as famous as her art.

She was a remarkable figure both on the stage and in private life . . . rather frail, with a wealth of black hair, a pair of dark eyes through which her whole being seemed to burn itself out in moments of agitation, a rather large mouth that could by turn appear sensuous, innocently soft, or shrewdly determined, and a high-strung, impetuous temperament that would brook no check or contradiction.

One look was enough for Keith. He tumbled in headlong abjection to her feet . . . metaphorically speaking, of course. From that fateful moment he was the obedient slave and private property of the imperious Selma, whose dark eyes surveyed him apprais-ingly. Then she smiled and accepted his homage as something due to her without any reciprocal obligation on her part.

Fröken Scheffer was soon followed by another young woman, her opposite in almost everything. Gunhild Dahlen had never been on the stage before, but had studied a good deal in preparation for it. She came from a good family that had frowned down all her theatrical dreams until the sudden death of her father and the discovery that he had left nothing behind him changed the whole situation. She had the charm of a spring flower, but at the same time her clear blue eyes and broadly chiselled features indicated a character to be counted with. She was as frank and square as Selma Scheffer was reserved and calculating beneath her vivacious exterior.

Unexpectedly Selma took greatly to Gunhild Dahlen

from the first, and so did Bob, though in a different way. He fell as completely for the innocent young country girl as Keith had already fallen for the sophisticated young lady from the capital . . . the difference being that Keith gave all there was in him to that one devotion, while Bob never for a moment permitted his vain courting of Gunhild to interfere with his successful exploits elsewhere. On those attractions were built a quartet of friendships that lasted the longer because neither swain was fully accepted or fully rejected. With Selma Scheffer's little old mother as chaperon, those four formed a coterie that was always together and that always had a good time . . . facts that did not fail to arouse a great deal of jealousy in the rest of the company.

The centre of gravity in Keith's existence seemed for a while to have shifted from his professional aspirations to his relationship with Selma, Gunhild and Bob. Fortunately all three of these were thoroughly determined to make a mark for themselves, and so their good times did not prevent them from working hard. Selma gave Keith much good advice, and his eagerness to please her went far toward overcoming the shyness induced in him by his experiences during the previous season.

Things went well otherwise. At a rehearsal, Keith was asked to read a part meant for another man who happened to be away. It was that of a warrior in Björnson's striking historical one-act drama, "Between the Battles." There was something about the part that caught his fancy as no other part had ever done. The speeches of that lonely warrior coming out of the black winter night into the firelit Norse log hut

seemed to express thoughts and feelings and moods long dormant within himself. While reading, he forgot himself entirely . . . forgot to wonder what impression he was making on Herr Sparrgren and the rest. A fierce joy took possession of him and held him until the last of his lines had been read. . . .

Then he loosed himself in dreams, while the others went on reading. It was as if his mind was trying to get hold of something it had known and valued long ago . . . an idea, or an ideal . . . something unattainable that nevertheless was more worth striving for than the world's most gorgeous possibilities. . . .

Out of this reverie he was awakened by the voice of Herr Sparrgren calling to him:

"You did so well with that part, Herr Wellander, that I think I'll give it to you for good."

And Selma, who was to play the chief female character, smiled pleased encouragement at him from the other side of the stage.

Not long afterwards he got another part . . . very different, indeed, and yet in some subtle way expressive of his own nature . . . a cobbler's apprentice, a genuine gutter-snipe, flung by fate into the hands of an actor engaged in memorizing the part of Othello within twenty-four hours and unconsciously defending himself against intrusions by making every caller represent some other part out of the great Shakespearian tragedy. It was sheer farce, but good fun, and Keith rose to it whole-heartedly, much to the surprise of Linder, who played the actor, and to the unfeigned satisfaction of Herr Sparrgren, who nagged and prodded to his heart's content during the rehearsals.

It looked as if Keith had found himself . . . as if

out of his fright, and his long floundering, and his subsequent surrender to an emotion more compelling than he had ever known before, the real actor had emerged at last.

XXI

THEN the great explosion came and shattered all his newly born hopes.

It was discussed at great length by the coterie, day after day. Selma talked torrents about it. And yet Keith was never able to grasp clearly what insignificant spark had let loose such havoc.

Selma had quarrelled with Herr Sparrgren . . . that much was clear. And so were the results.

It was a small quarrel to begin with . . . one of those that occur frequently in most companies. But Herr Sparrgren chose for some reason to insist on his directorial authority to the utmost, and Selma chose for some reason to defy it. Then the little quarrel grew into a big one.

Herr Sparrgren was highly sensitive to the atmosphere about him, and quite sincerely so. If any one showed himself out of harmony with the director's endeavours to the extent of making him seriously angry, that person became straightway an outcast with whom Herr Sparrgren would have no connection whatsoever. He dreaded seeing him . . . or her . . . in any play with which he himself was connected. Such plays he avoided putting on, and, of course, the offender got no new parts.

Inside of a few incredible weeks of acrimonious con-

troversy, Selma found herself in just that position, and the natural result must be her utter isolation within the company. In that crisis she appealed to the coterie, and her friends decided . . . generously or foolishly . . . to stand by her to the last gun. Their common life continued as before. As Selma had much less to do, they were more together and had a much better time. What had before been regarded as levity on their part now became subordination, and soon punishment began to be meted out to everybody concerned except Bob, who may have been protected by the presence of his great cousin in the background.

The results were more disastrous to Keith than to anybody else. Partly because of Selma and partly because of himself, the Björnson play was dropped after a single performance. So was, for other reasons, the little farce in which he had found an even more congenial outlet for his cooped-up spirits. No new parts fell to his share. Herr Sparrgren never spoke to him. Herr Snellman disregarded him utterly. More and more he lived exclusively in his communion with his friends, and particularly in his futile love for Selma.

During his first season with Herr Sparrgren he had hardly thought of women. There had been a few more or less sordid adventurings, leaving behind nothing but an increased disgust for cheap substitutes and a whetted appetite for real love.

He had been starved not only physically, but emotionally, and now his pent-up desires flung themselves madly, unreasoningly at the mocking figure of Selma. She accepted smilingly all he gave and refused with the same smile to give anything in return. She talked

sensibly to him, and he admitted the sensibility of her talk. Yet he longed and craved and pleaded and served . . . and in doing so he was not unhappy.

Not until another man appeared on the horizon . . . a young military cadet, even more of a boy than Keith, with whom, in spite of his youth and his insignificance, the shrewd, self-controlled Selma became as wildly enamoured as Keith was of her.

The coterie now consisted of five, for the cadet had flung caution to the winds and travelled more or less openly in the wake of the company . . . which did not improve matters, although no open scandal ever resulted.

There were scenes within the coterie. Keith first raged and then sulked. Selma told him that he was free to go. Gunhild sympathized with him, but could do nothing. Bob, still repulsed by Gunhild in spite of her evident liking for him, told Keith he was a fool for bothering his head seriously about any woman. Still Keith clung to the coterie, but in a rebellious spirit. It was perfectly plain that Selma wanted him there . . . wanted his faithful slavery without ever intending to reward it with anything but friendship. Keith told himself daily that, if he possessed a grain of self-respect, he would break away at once and for good. Yet he stayed on as before in the familiar companionship, but with an increasing sense of not belonging there.

Thus the winter and spring went by with a speed that took Keith's breath away when he realized how near another summer was. He learned, of course, that his services would not be wanted in the Sparrgren

company for another season, and he had just begun to wonder about his next step when the director made another unexpected and startling move.

He announced suddenly that the company would confine its program to a single play during the remaining six weeks of the season, and that all members now employed in that play would be free to leave at once with full pay to the end of the season and travelling expenses back to Stockholm. The members in question were Selma, Gunhild, Bob and Keith.

This happened at Kalmar, where Keith once, as a travelling saleman, had made a Sunday excursion to the glorious old ruins of Borgholm Castle and thus been inspired to his first effort at real poetry. Four years had passed since then . . . four long and eventful years . . . that first poetic effort had in due time been followed by others which now lay in his trunks futile and forgotten like all his other efforts . . . and he was no nearer to an understanding of himself and his place in life than he was during that first visit to Kalmar four years before.

XXII

GUNHILD went home to the west coast to see her family. Selma started south with her mother, having decided on the spur of the moment to use her unexpected leisure for studies abroad. Bob and Keith picked up Kalle Storm and boarded a steamer headed for Stockholm.

Kalle Storm was a young dentist whose acquaintance they had made on the opposite coast of Sweden

They were delighted to find him in Kalmar, and still more delighted to learn that he was on his way to the capital to pass his final examinations as a D.D.S.

A mane of light hair waved picturesquely above Kalle's head, which resembled Strindberg's in being very wide at the top and tapering sharply toward the chin. Big, slightly bulging eyes gazed at the world in childlike wonder. But woe to him that let himself be deceived by the apparent innocence of those eyes. Kalle had a tongue like a wasp's sting when provoked, and a wit to match it. Ordinarily, however, he was the jolliest and gentlest of human creatures . . . a sort of super-mountebank by the grace of God . . . one of those rare beings to whom is granted the gift of drawing soul-relieving laughter from their fellow men as soon as they open their mouths.

Kalle was just the companion Keith needed. The latter tried hard to be melancholy but couldn't keep it up in the face of his friend's good-humoured raillery. And soon he discovered that the parting from Selma had no such profound importance to him as he, sentimentally, had struggled to make himself believe. On top of it, flashlike, came the revelation that he was done with her, just as once he had found himself done with Lisa. He had been done with her for a good long while, he now knew, and he was glad of it. But his gladness had a pang in it. She had taken so much and given so little. He felt so empty.

Then there was the future . . . a question mark.

"What are you going to do," he turned to Bob, who was smoking away contentedly while his eyes roved among the none too promising specimens of femininity visible on the after-deck.

"My cousin thinks she can get me an engagement at the Royal Theatre," he answered placidly. "And you?"

Keith hesitated. Then a wild idea came to him and he seized on it as on an inspiration.

"I shall try to get in there, too," he said firmly.

"You can't," rejoined the startled Bob. "What's the use of trying?"

"What will you bet," Keith ventured, aware of Bob's fondness for gambling.

"Bet nothing," Bob shot back sharply. "Because then I might be tempted to work against you. And I want to help you if I can. But the idea is crazy . . . it's absolutely impossible, I tell you."

"Crazy ideas and impossibilities have always been my specialties," Keith explained, his mind running back to the days when every one declared an organization of wholesale clerks to be impossible.

He had never thought of the Royal Theatre until then. Ten minutes before the idea of it would have seemed as preposterous to himself as it now seemed to Bob. But now his mind was made up. Joining another travelling company, probably not as good as that of Herr Sparrgren, was too humiliating to be considered. He had no connection of any kind leading to any Stockholm theatre, and so he might as well try for the Royal as for another one. He recalled an American saying often quoted by Bob:

"There is always plenty of room at the top."

Furthermore, he was going to make it a test. If he could not get into the Royal Theatre, he might as well quit the stage at once. He had begun to doubt

his own fitness for it. Of course, he had never had a fair chance in the Sparrgren company . . . luck had been against him . . . and yet . . . he could not free himself from that doubt.

If he failed . . . what then? He didn't have the slightest notion. And so he turned with double zest to the enjoyment of the punch, the view of the passing coast, and Kalle's brilliantly idiotic sallies.

XXIII

KEITH'S mother was delighted at having him in Stockholm for good. If he were to be connected with the stage, the Royal Theatre was the thing by all means. The father shook his head and looked critical.

"You can never get in there," he said, "and if you do, so much the worse for you."

"Why," asked Keith puzzled.

"Because it will cost much and bring little."

Keith had thought of that.

"Can you let me live here without paying," he asked, hating himself for doing so, but too bent on the pursuit of his own interests to let himself be checked. Then he added: "Until I get over the worst?"

"You can," his father replied after a pause. "And I'll even be glad of it for your mother's sake. . . . But you'll never get over the worst . . . not there."

Keith shrugged his shoulders. He was accustomed to his father's pessimistic view of things. The gener-

osity accompanying that view he accepted as a matter of course, in spite of the scruples he had felt in advance. He was still very young.

Then he began to look for approaches to the goal he had set for himself. The first survey was most discouraging. He didn't know a soul connected with the institution into which he was trying to break. Undaunted by this fact, he began a series of calls on all the authorities involved. His reception was distinctly cold, but not so cold as it might have been. The very audacity of his request amused some of the men he saw. But their appreciation of the humour implied in his efforts did not make those efforts any more hopeful.

Finally it became clear to Keith that without pull of some kind he could never expect to succeed. Then a new idea occurred to him . . . an idea almost as crazy as the one it was meant to promote. The great director of the Royal Theatre had a quite insignificant brother, who had a kind but equally insignificant wife who had a somewhat more significant sister, who once had been connected with the stage herself, and this sister Keith happened to have met somewhere.

That was enough. Keith called on the sister, who was trying to make up for life's many disappointments by studying Feuchtersleben's "Dietetics of the Soul."

Was Keith interested in that wonderful book?

Not yet, but he would read it at once . . . in the original . . . and he left with a borrowed copy in his pocket.

This he never read, to tell the truth, but he had gathered enough from Fröken Holmlund's talk to

know what it was about . . . the control of the body by the mind. He believed in it, of course . . . though he had found it strangely incredible in practice.

Keith was young and not bad-looking, with a certain ingenuous vivacity of thought and talk that seemed to charm some of the people he met. Fröken Holmlund could not yet be called old. She had dreamily disturbing eyes that used to rest on Keith with an expression he could never fathom. He wished he could have done something to please Fröken Holmlund, but he could never think of anything. At times he became very uneasy in her presence, while she was talking Feuchtersleben in a far-off, pensive voice. . . .

In the meantime, however, she talked to her sister, who talked to her husband, who talked to his brother, who talked to his colleagues in the management of the Royal Theatre . . . and one fine day Keith learned that he was engaged for the next season as full-fledged actor at the lordly salary of sixty *kronor* a month . . . or $13, let us say.

The salary was purely nominal, of course, but he was on the inside after all, arrived at the goal of his heart's desire, and he might rise.

After that he called just once on Fröken Holmlund and thanked her in terms that were made more fervent by his anxiety to get away than by his gratefulness. He was, as already remarked, unusually young for his years.

Fröken Holmlund wished him luck with a strangely resigned note in her voice, and then predicted that he would surely reach the mistiest peaks of histrionic

achievement, if he would only go on reading "Dietetics of the Soul" with the same sympathy he had shown for that wonderful book so far.

XXIV

KALLE STORM had passed his examinations with honour. Bob and Keith had landed where they wanted . . . and Keith had proved that he could do as well as Bob . . . or almost so, seeing that there was a slight difference in salaries.

Here was a triple cause for celebration, and celebrate they did . . . for a couple of weeks . . . morning, noon and night . . . or, to put those diurnal categories in their proper sequence: noon and night and morning.

Keith hardly ever went to bed before three. And when he did, the bed was apt to rock him to sleep a little more vigorously than he cared for. The amount of liquor consumed was terrific. Keith alone would not infrequently have as much as four pints of Swedish punch after supper, not counting other forms of alcoholic stimulation. Yet he kept his head pretty clear, and, as old Eskilson once said, the more he imbibed, the more orderly he became. It was always he who had to settle the accounts when they were through for the night, and to apportion the shares of expense on the basis of "each for himself." No matter when and how he came home, his clothes lay neatly folded beside his bed in the morning, and there was never any other signs of disorder in the room. He came in very quietly, too . . . so quietly that his mother found

it hard to tell just when he arrived, although she lay awake listening for his step on the landing and the turn of the key in his door. Perhaps that was one of the reasons why she did not take his late hours more to heart than she did. Another reason was that, after all, he was there, and she could get a glimpse of him now and then. But the father looked a little graver than usual, though he never said a word to Keith.

Once in a while Keith wondered where the money came from. He had very little to spare and spent more than he could. But it was a drop in the ocean. Kalle and Bob had more, and they insisted always that Keith should come along whether he had the means or not. But even their resources, as Keith knew them, did not account for all the money spent on their indulgences. Of course, they were rarely alone, and as a group they were much sought after. There was a lot of treating and a considerable amount of "borrowing" . . . although these operations were by no means onesided. But even at that . . . Keith could not help wondering.

They were eating oysters one night at the cosy old restaurant known as the Hamburger Bourse, where there was no music to disturb their philosophizing and æstheticizing. Suddenly Kalle poised an oyster shell in midair and spoke:

"I wonder where it comes from?"

"Holland," said Keith.

"Not the money we pay for it," Kalle rejoined, "and that was what I was thinking of."

"Loans," Bob suggested.

"Yes," resumed Kalle, who could be serious at times. "That's it! Everybody is borrowing in this

peculiar old country . . . everybody is living beyond everybody else's income . . . and nobody is paying back an *öre*. Some day the whole thing must blow up, and the whole blasted country will have to live on potatoes and herring ever afterward."

"No," Keith objected laughingly. "They'll make *brännvin* of the potatoes."

"That kind of thing won't go in America," Bob mused. "There you have to earn your fun."

"Was that why you came home, Bob," Kalle shot at him, his eyes sparkling with mischief again.

XXV

THERE were moments when Keith ecstatically whispered to himself: "Royal Court Comedian." That was not his title, of course, as he had only obtained a temporary engagement, and the title in question was reserved for those who had become members of the great institution for life. But truth can bear being stretched a little when we have just landed a particularly troublesome fish, be it ever so small.

He regretted not being able to assume his new duties at once, but his engagement did not begin until August, and it was now the end of May. There was nothing to do in the meantime. He ought to have gone to work and earned some money, but nothing was farther from his thoughts, and so he inquired once more what Bob was going to do.

Bob's cousin was spending the summer in strict professional retirement at the little fishing port of Grissle-

hamn, halfway between Stockholm and the place where Keith started his theatrical career. Bob was going to rent himself a room somewhere in the country near Grisslehamn in order to rest and prepare himself for the labours of the coming season. It would be lonely in spite of the cousin. Perhaps Keith might join him? It would make their living cheaper.

That was what Keith wanted, of course. But the money problem involved was a hard nut to crack, although their expenses would be very small. Bob could afford to rest. He had drawn a bigger salary than Keith in the Sparrgren company, and his salary at the Royal Theatre would be four times as large as that of his friend. The cousin had done well by him. And Bob had done a good deal himself, for in a single season he had won a reputation as impersonator of a certain type of sillily smiling and blindly self-satisfied fop . . . just himself, some people said . . . at least as far as externals were concerned.

But Keith raised the money . . . somehow . . . and joined Bob.

It was a placid, peaceful, happy summer. They talked America. Bob still dreamt of going back, though his dreams had lost some of their original vivid colouring. If he did so, he would not bother about the stage . . . not he. Instead he would go in for making money . . . big money . . . and the best way of doing so was by starting a saloon. . . .

"A *krog,*" gasped Keith, using the nearest Swedish equivalent.

"You don't understand," said Bob, "because you haven't been there. A saloon means a *krog,* of course, but it isn't one. And there are many kinds of saloons.

Mine would be first class . . . tip-top . . . gilded . . . with a tremendous mahogany bar and plush sofas in the rear."

Keith was interested in the returns foreshadowed. Otherwise Bob's dream left him strangely cold. A *krog,* even of the gilded kind, was all right to visit, but not to run . . . not for a person of Keith's mental make-up. That much he knew about himself at least. Going to America was another thing . . . and there was more than saloons to be found over there. . . .

"They can work over there," Bob said significantly during one of their many talks. "Just as well as we can loaf here. Talk of work in this country . . . pooh!"

Where had Keith heard something like that before? Oh, Björnson . . . that night at the Malmbergs.

"But what strikes you more than anything else," Bob ran on, "is the number of young people you see. It is the land of youth. Everybody is young . . . and youth has a chance . . . while here the first thing they make sure of is that you are over forty. People get old over there, too, of course, but you hardly notice them because they are not bloated and clumsy."

"That's the land for me," Keith concluded with a glance at his own hopelessly boyish image in the mirror across the bare room in Fru Pettersson's boarding-house. "Some day I'll go, I guess."

To prepare Keith for America, Bob began to talk English to him, demanding replies in the same language, but his enjoyment of Keith's pronunciation was so thorough that the lessons had to be abandoned! Instead, and to make up for it, he taught Keith how

to play poker. Keith learned the game in a day . . . all but the bluffing, of which he could never see the point.

At times they sailed . . . in an old boat so leaky that one of them had to bail most of the time. Generally they stayed in the narrow sound between the mainland and the long-stretched island at the northern end of which lay the little cluster of wind-swept buildings that then constituted all there was of Grisslehamn. But one day they conceived the happy idea of rounding the northern point of that island for an excursion into the open Baltic. There had been a storm two days before, but now the weather was sunnily smiling, with only a fair breeze blowing.

They took along a mysterious gentleman wearing the American name of Brown, although he looked like a Mongolian and talked like a Swede of not too prosperous backgrounds. Herr Brown had known Bob in America. Hearing of Bob's presence at Grisslehamn, he had settled there for the summer, too.

Though Keith regarded Herr Brown with unfeigned suspicion, he was taken along nevertheless, and everything went well as long as they remained behind the sheltering island, where the water was quite smooth. Bob was at the tiller and Keith at the foresail. Herr Brown was supposed to do the bailing, but did it mostly with his mouth.

After a rather risky passage through a narrow channel badly choked up with treacherous reefs, they emerged suddenly into the open sea, lying glorious before them in the full midday sunlight . . . but there the after-effects of the recent storm were still very much in evidence. The mild inland breeze had fresh-

ened into something like a half gale. Big white-crested waves came rushing shoreward with a fierce hissing that made Herr Brown turn as white as their combs. The little craft tossed and span and dipped like a cork.

Bob clung grimly to the tiller. Keith was cursing the flapping foresail with an eloquence and ardour that would have made his luck if repeated on the stage. But on the bottom of the boat lay Herr Brown, evidently in his last throes, and above the wind and the waves and Keith's perfervid language rose his shrill screams:

"Lord, do you mean to kill me, you devils? Lord! take me home at once, you idiots! Lord, I don't want to die . . . I don't want to die!"

Keith thought they were in a rather tight place, and Bob, admitted it openly, but that meant a fight, and to this they bent every ounce of strength and will they had . . . instinctively, as a matter of course. They had no time to be afraid, and the antics of the white-faced man on the bottom of the boat filled them with a sort of bewildered annoyance. And as those piercing shrieks continued to rise higher and higher, Bob finally yelled:

"Shut up, you fool, or I'll brain you here and now."

They got the boat around at last, and with a favouring wind the rest was easy. Five minutes later Herr Brown was talking of his own fortitude in the face of almost certain death. Neither Bob nor Keith said a word until they were alone in their room again, when the latter burst out:

"I used to think myself a perfect coward in schoo

. . . but I guess that must have been artistic exaggeration."

"You must remember that Brown can't swim," Bob said. "And also . . . do you know that he has the t-b's and probably can't live long?"

"And yet. . . ." Keith gulped as if trying to swallow too large a piece. Then he recalled poor Herr Stangenberg, who also had tuberculosis and who insisted on ordering a new spring suit a few days before his death.

"Do you know," he said musingly at last, "I have never been able to understand the way people act toward death . . . I never think of it . . . didn't even when our fix seemed worst today. . . ."

"Search me," yawned Bob, who was not given to philosophy about anything but women.

But Keith entered the memory of that day on the credit side of his mental account . . . not as a merit acquired, but as an asset gained.

XXVI

MUCH need not be said about the one season during which Keith was an humble member of the Royal Theatre company . . . proud at first, and then quite indifferent, but always humble in fact, if not in spirit. It proved a disappointment from the first . . . and it seems probable that the disappointment was mutual.

The theatre might be viewed as a venerable institution with proud and noble traditions . . . or as a

coterie of able, but rather too self-satisfied men and women whose secured position made them less susceptible to the hopes and misgivings and aspirations of their own day than otherwise they might have been. In either case, a magic circle had been established within which only the initiates were admitted, and of those Keith was not one.

He had passed the threshold of the place by an accident, and care was taken that he should not penetrate too far. While physically inside, he was spiritually an outsider and treated as such. At the most, he was regarded as on a level with the more advanced among the pupils in the dramatic school connected with the theatre. It was even suggested that he attend the courses of instruction furnished by this institution, and so he did for a little while . . . until the recital of poetry once more became too much for him, and he simply staid away.

Yet everybody was kind to him in so far as they became aware of his existence. He got parts of a kind . . . waiters, valets, drivers and porters again, but rather inferior to the similar crop harvested during his first year with Herr Sparrgren. There was not an earthly chance for him to distinguish himself in connection with any task entrusted to him, and soon he ceased to try. Perhaps the spectacle of how Bob was received and taken care of, both socially and professionally, did as much as anything else to convince him of the futility of his own efforts.

Nor was his heart in the work any longer. The spurt of inspired ambition that had changed the aspect of his whole existence for a brief while during his

second year in the Sparrgren company had never returned.

"What is an actor anyhow," he cried one evening when he was having a sober glass with a few older members who still were more or less on the outside like himself. "A mouthpiece for other people's thoughts and feelings . . . a puppet made to dance according to the ideas of some one else . . . a simulation of reality that vanishes like a spectre at the final drop of the curtain! And I don't want to be a mouthpiece merely, or a mirage . . . I want to be myself and speak my own thoughts."

"Then you have mistaken your calling," retorted one of his comrades ironically. "You had better become a playwright."

"I wish I could write," Keith burst out. "I do wish I could write!"

There were compensations nevertheless. He had free admission to all the other theatres, and he saw and learned a good deal about the drama and the stage, as well as about the profession which he more and more realized as not his own.

He saw the famous Court Company of Saxe-Meiningen, which was then visiting Stockholm . . . saw a number of their performances . . . saw the great Joseph Kainz as Dunois in "Die Jungfer vom Orleans." The mass action impressed and attracted him, but against the German style of individual acting he rebelled violently. He was still so uncertain in his own mind, so groping, so lacking in theory as well as practice, that he could not tell what offended him about it until Judic arrived with a French company. Seeing

the man playing the lover's part in a modern comedy appear with tousled hair, ridiculous clothing and sputtering speech . . . or very much as Keith himself might have appeared in a similar situation . . . he knew.

Ibsen came on one of his rare visits, and "The League of Youth" was given in his honour at the Royal Opera. From his seat halfway up the well of white and gold that constituted the auditorium in the old Opera, Keith had a pretty good view of the great little man in one of the boxes surrounded by a group of representative women . . . they all a-flutter, on parade, eager for a word from the poet-prophet, and he silent, reserved, embarrassed, smiling grimly now and then, or making very formal little courtesies, and looking all the while exactly like one of his own caricatures.

Keith looked, and laughed, and envied, and thought of that other, now defunct League of Youth, and dreamed. . . .

If he could only write!

XXVII

HE no longer saw as much of Bob as he had been accustomed to. Bob was accepted as an initiate almost from the start, and while he never turned his back on Keith, it was plain that keeping company with his old chum meant more or less of a sacrifice to him. Many factors combined to produce that situation. Bob liked to play cards for higher stakes than Keith could afford, for one thing, and his

cousin's prestige as well as his own attractiveness was bringing him into aristocratic circles to which Keith's obscurity formed an insurmountable bar.

Yet the old tie was not quite broken, and under the lingering influence of the rapidly advancing Bob, Keith got himself some good clothes . . . on credit . . . and went around with a gilt bracelet on his left wrist, and made a fool of himself in various other ways. What it meant was that he tried hard to build up some sort of personality for himself, and he had not yet mastered the cruel but precious lesson that it cannot be done from the outside.

Luck, however, threw him into the companionship of a group of young painters and sculptors, most of them students at the Royal Academy, and all of them more or less rebellious against established traditions. It was a wild gang, the leader of which was one Janne Pors . . . an eccentric painter, not without gifts, but far more fond of talking and drinking than of painting. They all drank a lot, and lived as much in cafés and restaurants as their generally depleted pocketbooks would permit, and raised Cain when, toward morning, their heads had begun to whirl with explosive impulses. What they had, they had in common. If one member of the gang sold a sketch or got a loan from a trustful maiden aunt, all profitted equally by it.

But in spite of their wild life and wilder talk, they were all bent on doing something, and this something had to come out of themselves, a creation of their own spirits. They talked mostly of painting and sculpture . . . of new ideas and achievements concerning their own particular fields . . . but Keith soon saw that what they said applied to the theatre, to the

drama, to all literature, to every form of art as well. Much of what they said connected curiously with the talk he had heard from Herr Sparrgren after his trouble with Linder, and under the influence of it art ceased once for all to be a mere word in his vocabulary.

There was a principle back of it, he saw at last, and it was universal. Where it appeared, things sprang into being that possessed a vitality independent of utility, of business, of money, of everything that Keith had come to hate because, in some mysterious fashion, it seemed to stand in way of what he was groping for. Like the rest of them, he began to dream of doing things . . . things that would come out of his own spirit . . . things done not for the sake of compensation of any kind, be it money, preferment or fame, but for the joy connected with the doing. Under the pressure of that influence, he fished out his little bundle of poems and examined them carefully, longingly, lovingly once more. When he was done with them, he dropped them back into their former hiding place and sighed again:

"If I could only write!"

XXVIII

IT happened most illogically. . . .

In spite of his duties at the theatre and his pleasures with the gang, there was always a lot of time left on his hands, unemployed and burdensome. For studies he seemed to have no desire whatsoever . . . nor did he know what to study. Then somebody suggested that he try to write for the news-

papers and gave him the name of a man prominently connected with the Daily News . . . the paper his father always kept. Keith thought it a mere waste of time to look up the man in question, but he did so for sheer lack of an alternative, and was admitted.

"What can you do," asked Herr Söderblom.

"I don't know," Keith confessed.

"What have you written?"

"Poems only."

Herr Söderblom sniffed contemptuously.

"Listen," he said, "we need fiction . . . stories. We want to run one every day, and we can never get enough to do so. Go and write some. We pay for them."

"But I have never tried," Keith stammered. "I don't think I could put a plot together to save my life."

"It's easy," the journalist reassured him. "Take my advice . . . try!"

That was the end of the interview. On the way home, Keith was feeling very unhappy and disappointed. But at the same time a part of himself seemed to have gone off on its own hook and be working away at something independently of the rest.

When he got home, he was pulled toward his writing desk by a mysterious power that would brook no resistance. He sat down and picked up a pen without being aware of any intention of using it. A minute later he was writing away for dear life . . . a story had shaped itself in his mind . . . a story that had nothing to do with anything he had ever heard or experienced . . . a love story built on a conventional pattern, but with a rather original twist to its development.

Before night the story was finished. It read well. The next day he copied it and took it up to Herr Söderblom, who looked very pleased at seeing the manuscript.

"That's the way to go at it," he cried. "You cannot get anywhere without trying. I shall read it at once, and you will hear from me in a couple of days."

Three days later Keith received a notice entitling him to draw fifteen *kronor* at the business office of the Daily News. It was great . . . but greater still to read his own words in print, with the initials "K. W." at the bottom. The thrill of it surpassed the one experienced when he got his first part.

"By heavens," shouted Keith excitedly to the gang, "it's just like Molière . . . I must have been writing prose all the time without knowing it."

And during the days that followed, Spain was enriched by a record number of new castles.

But when Keith tried to add a second story to that first one, he failed miserably. Nothing would come. The mystic fountain of inspiration had been sealed again.

XXIX

ONCE more the season was drawing to its close, and the advancing spring filled Keith's blood with more than customary restlessness. Never had his mind been so charged with unformulated longings, and never had he known less about what to do or where to turn. Every part of his own self was drawn into that struggle against difficulties

which seemed the more unconquerable because they were as intangible as the elusive Boygen in "Peer Gynt."

From reliable sources he had gathered that he would be permitted to stay where he was for another reason at least, but only on the same humiliating conditions . . . as a novice, with a merely nominal compensation and without hope of any parts that might win him a little of that public attention on which, in the last instance, the actor's position so completely depends. The prospect was not cheerful, and if he refused it . . . what then? He had landed in a blind alley, and of escape he had found no suggestion so far.

America was in his mind a good deal, though he talked less of it than he had done when to go there was a dream rather than an escape. The idea of it had lost some of its attraction. He thought of it as a flight, an admission of defeat. On the other hand the yearning to get out, to get away from his native country for a while, to see other parts of the world, had gained tremendously in strength. Such a move had begun to assume the aspect of a panacea for all his evils. He might study . . . he might find the secret of overcoming his own limitations as an actor . . . he might discover his own real self, its true powers and possibilities. . . .

It was all a question of money, and, of course, that's what made the whole situation so pitifully helpless. . . .

He was crossing North Bridge on his way home late one afternoon. Before him towered the massive pile of the Royal Palace, every window in its wide-flung façade set on fire by the light from the setting sun. He looked at it as one looks at familiar things . . .

almost unseeingly. Then he came to a dead halt. An idea had occurred to him . . . one quite worthy of a long series of wild ones that had preceded it.

"The King," he whispered to himself.

The conception of the nation as a big family and the King as its father used to be deeply rooted in the Swedish mind. It was a part of Keith's consciousness although he had not been aware of it until that moment on North Bridge when it flashed on him in the manner of a revelation. Once he had thought of it, he marvelled at not having done so before. It seemed so natural . . . and particularly to him who, after all, might almost regard himself as a part of the Royal Household.

Without a word to any one about his intentions Keith made a few inquiries and learned without difficulty what he needed to know.

The next Tuesday morning at ten o'clock he made his way up a long and wide flight of stairs to the lesser Hall of Audience. Those stairs reminded him of his first visit to the bank where his father worked when Keith was still a small boy.

The hall was absolutely bare of furniture, but a row of gorgeous chandeliers were suspended from the ceiling, and the inlaid floor shone like a mirror.

Seven or eight men were scattered about the place waiting to be admitted. Most of them were elderly with an air of importance, and with many decorations glistening on their broad chests. Several of them showed unmistakable signs of nervousness. The sight of them made Keith feel very young and foolish as he tripped gingerly across the long hall to one of the windows facing on North Stream.

There lay all Stockholm spread at his feet, and the spectacle made him forget both nervousness and self-importance . . . the Stockholm he knew so well and loved so much in spite of everything . . . Holy Ghost Isle with the Royal Stables at one end and the tall poplars of the Stream Park at the other; Gustavus Adolphus Square with the equestrian statue of the hero-king pointing significantly eastward, toward the land of the hereditary enemy; the weather-worn pile of the old Royal Opera; the Royal Gardens with the statue of another hero-king, the mad Charles XII, also pointing eastward; and so on. . . .

Keith let his glance stray farther and farther . . . It was all familiar to him, every part of it . . . and it would be hard to leave it . . . the place where he had grown up . . . where, after all, he had friends . . . where he had lived so many enjoyable hours, as well as sad and miserable ones. . . .

A young man in a black redingote came up and interrupted his reverie by asking for his name and errand.

"I am Captain So-and-so," he explained; "adjutant to His Majesty."

Keith gave his name and professional position readily enough. Then he hesitated. It seemed so much worse than speaking to the King himself.

"Have I got to tell," he asked.

"Not necessarily," the young man replied with a slight smile. "But it may make things easier."

So Keith told.

"I fear that's impossible," said the young man, his smile a little broader than before.

"To see the King. . . ." Keith's heart sank within him.

"Oh, no . . . but to get what you want. . . . I fear it's no use hoping. . . ."

"But I want to try," Keith insisted.

"Go on, my boy," urged the adjutant, still smiling. "And good luck to you!"

A door opened and Keith passed into another hall . . . smaller but just as bare. At the other end of it was a door leading into a small cabinet, the middle of which was occupied by a gigantic writing desk facing the door.

In the doorway stood a very tall man in the undress uniform of an admiral, but with a broad blue ribbon running across his chest from shoulder to hip. He stood very straight, with his feet far apart and his sword crossed behind him.

It was the King.

As Keith approached and looked up at the familiar countenance, he noticed with intense surprise that the King's cheeks were heavily rouged. But the eyes that met his own were very kind and had a distinct suggestion of mirth in them. The adjutant had been talking, Keith guessed, but didn't mind.

"You wish to go abroad," said the King.

"I do," replied Keith, and his words came astonishingly easy. "If I could study out there, I think I could get ahead faster afterward."

"I like your spirit," he heard the tall man in front of him say. "But tell me . . . have you studied all we have to teach you at home?"

"No, I suppose not," Keith confessed.

"Then I'll tell you what to do. Stay here two years more and work hard. Then come back to me, and

ve'll see . . . I shall talk to your director and tell him o keep an eye on you."

"I thank Your Majesty," Keith stammered, gazing vistfully at the truly majestic figure and the kingly ace before him. "But. . . ."

He was on the verge of explaining that then he night be forced to go to America, but in the last moment he checked himself . . . it would not be a very diplomatic remark.

"But what," asked the King encouragingly.

"It's always a question of waiting here in Sweden," Keith blurted out desperately.

"True!" The King smiled . . . there was French blood in his veins, and perhaps he understood and sympathized. "But take my advice in this case, and I don't think you will regret it."

"I am most grateful for Your Majesty's kindness," Keith managed to say, and somehow he reached the larger hall again.

"Well," inquired the adjutant as Keith passed him.

"He promised," said Keith, "if I'll wait two years,"

Then he escaped, fearful of more questions.

His errand had proved vain, but he was glad to have seen the King. The feeling of not being wanted at all had subsided. He wished that he could wait, but. . . .

"For the land's sake, Wellander," called the director of the Royal Theatre a few days later when he happened to espy Keith on the stage, "have you been up to see the King himself?"

"I have," replied Keith defiantly and proudly.

"You crazy idiot," exclaimed the director, who al-

ways posed and looked as if he were about to break off at the middle. But there was a reassuring glitter in his eyes, and the irony that always coloured his speech was not unfriendly. "Well, he spoke very kindly of you to me, and you may count yourself lucky indeed! What are you going to do now?"

"Do you think I can get a raise for next season," Keith asked breathlessly.

"I fear not," the director said. "In fact, I know it's quite out of the question. We don't really need you, you see, and you have done nothing so far to warrant a raise under such circumstances. But if you can hang on and work hard. . . ."

"I can't," Keith cried, forgetful of everything but his own plight. "And I think I shall go to America."

"Well, of all your crazy ideas that's the craziest yet," the director rejoined, eyeing Keith with a cynical curiosity that nevertheless suggested a certain amount of regret.

"I know," Keith grinned, feeling as if he had burned his ships. "But it has a finality that the other lacked."

XXX

IN two weeks more the theatre would close for the summer and the members of the company would scatter to the four quarters of the compass. The air was full of talk about what to do during the summer. All had plans but Keith, who could do nothing but listen in pained silence.

One day the whole thing became too much for him

All other feelings and considerations seemed routed by a wild desire to get away. Finding his father at home in the evening, Keith suddenly turned to him with the remark:

"Supposing I should go to America. . . ."

"Or the moon," his father rejoined quietly.

"But I mean it," Keith cried.

"It's the third time. . . ."

"As in the fairy tales." Keith had to smile. "But you must remember that the third time is charm. Supposing. . . ."

"I wish you wouldn't," his mother broke in.

The father remained silent for a long while. He looked straight at Keith, but apparently without seeing him. Keith looked back at him, trying vainly to catch his glance. He had a curious impression of a change in the man seated at the other side of the table. It was as if his father were growing older and sadder while he sat there looking through his son at something that filled his own mind to the exclusion of everything else.

"Taking it all in all," Keith finally heard him say in a barely audible undertone, "I believe the best thing you could do would be to go . . . to America."

"Oh, Carl," sobbed the mother. "How can you say so? We shall never see him again."

"How do you know," asked Herr Wellander tonelessly of his wife. "That lies in the Lord's hand, and it's better to lose him in that way than. . . ."

"I know what you meant to say," Keith put in as his father stopped abruptly. "I think you are right . . . that's why I have felt so strongly that I must get away from here. . . ."

"But how would you live when you got over there," the father inquired. "Have you thought of it . . . for over there you will have no one to draw on for help . . . no home like ours to fall back on."

"I have thought of it," Keith replied, but with a great deal of hesitation. "There are any number of Swedish-American newspapers out there, and I might get a position with one of them."

"You know nothing about that kind of work," the father objected.

"I might learn before I go," Keith suggested, still more hesitatingly. "And if I learned, I might not have to go. . . ."

"Why don't you," pleaded the mother. "That is so much better . . . and I am sure you can do anything you make up your mind about."

"Perhaps," the father said, closing his lips very tightly for a moment. "But if you find that you must go, Keith . . . well, I have no money myself . . . not an *öre* to spare . . . but there is a man who would help me, if I should ask him. I don't like to do so, but if . . . I know I can get the money for you. . . ."

Keith couldn't say a word. He knew what such an appeal would mean to his father, and the thought of it seemed to crush him beneath its unbearable weight. It was too much . . . not only to ask, but to accept. . . .

Then he noticed that his mother was crying. He went over to her and put his arm about her. His heart, which so long had been hardened against her, seemed to melt within him. Years fell away from him. He was a small boy once more, kneeling at her

feet and watching her face for every changing mood. . . .

The father sat watching both of them, his eyes blinking a little from time to time. . . .

"Perhaps," Keith whispered at last. . . . "Perhaps I can find a way . . . without going. . . ."

XXXI

AS soon as the theatre closed and Keith was free, having refused an offer to have his contract renewed on the same terms for another year, he called on Dr. Rolling, editor of the *Evening Gazette,* and explained what he wanted . . . not regular employment, but a chance to work as volunteer until he could decide definitely what to do.

Dr. Rolling was a young man with sharply questioning eyes . . . a son of the man who had founded the *Gazette,* and now made editor for the express purpose of bringing it back to its original liberal principles. He looked Keith over so long and so carefully that the latter gave himself up for lost and nearly collapsed when he heard the editor say in a very cordial tone:

"You can begin tomorrow. I'll introduce you at once to the news editor. And while we can give you no regular salary, you will be paid ordinary rates for everything you get printed in the paper."

A voice from heaven could have sounded no sweeter in Keith's ears. And the next day he went to work. First he was given short notices to re-write. Then he

was sent out to write up sundry minor events, and little by little greater ones. The work kept him in a constant state of pleasant suspense. One day he attended a funeral, the next a show, and the third a yachting regatta. Writing did not come easy to him, but he enjoyed thoroughly to struggle with recalcitrant words.

A French squadron dropped anchor in the harbour on an official visit. The King gave a banquet for the senior officers and made a speech in which he referred to the French origin of his own family. Every orchestra in the city was playing the Marseillaise twenty times a day. It was in 1891 . . . just twenty years after the close of France's disastrous war with Germany. Keith wrote on his own initiative a sort of prose poem comparing the situation then and now. Dr. Rolling printed it conspicuously, and Keith felt that he had arrived as a journalist, if not as a writer.

The dogdays were reached. There was no news. Everybody yawned. Keith pondered, faithful to an old habit of his.

"Why wait for news," he asked one day of the news editor.

"Because we have to," this dignitary snapped back between vigorous strokes with a big pencil . . . for news editors are the same all over the world, it seems.

"News can be made," Keith retorted.

Herr Flodin sat up straight and looked at Keith as if the latter had proposed to make the sun rise before its due time.

"I suppose you have discovered the recipe," he remarked sarcastically.

"I think I have an idea," parried Keith, trying to

look modest. "Has anybody ever gone down in a diver's suit and written about it?"

"Not that I know of," admitted Herr Flodin. "And why should they?"

'Don't you think the readers might be interested in such an experience?"

Herr Flodin looked hard at Keith before he let out a whistle.

"Would you dare to do it yourself," he asked at last.

"Dare," repeated Keith. "I can't see any danger in it."

"Well, go and see Dr. Rolling."

So Keith did, and Dr. Rolling first laughed at him, and then treated him as a hero, both of which attitudes seemed equally unwarranted to Keith.

"There's the big salvage company," Keith elucidated. "They have a dozen big steamers, and one of them is always at work on a wreck somewhere in the archipelago. I'll ask them to let me go out there, if you will give me a letter to them."

"I don't think they will let you," was Dr. Rolling's final verdict. "I don't think you can do it, and I don't think it can be done by any one but a trained diver. But you shall have the letter and you can go to our cashier for any reasonable amount of expenses."

It was up-hill work, but in the end Keith got from the company not only a permission, but an order to the captain of one of their steamers to let him go down in a diver's suit unless the weather was absolutely prohibitive.

Keith travelled the better part of a day on one of the little steamers that radiate from Stockholm to all

points of the funnel-shaped array of islands outside. Late in the afternoon, at the last landing, he transferred himself and his handbag to a small sailboat manned by a couple of fishermen and journeyed with them for two hours more.

The sun was just dropping behind the shoreline back of which lay Stockholm, when Keith at last stood on the deck of the big black wrecking tug and presented his letter to the captain . . . a white-haired little man with very blue eyes, who was taking it easy on the after-deck with a grog beside him.

The captain read the letter carefully twice. Then he looked up at Keith and seemed to read him with equal care. At last his eyes rested on Keith's lower limbs, and he asked laconically:

"With those legs?"

The two mates and a couple of sailors heard him and laughed.

Keith turned crimson, but did not flinch.

"They have stood me in good stead so far," he said, "and I think they'll do for this occasion, too."

"All right," said the captain, suddenly becoming genial. "Let us have some supper, and then we can talk it over tomorrow."

For two days Keith pleaded and the captain postponed. Then he gave in. And Keith donned the woollens, the rubber casings, the lead-soled shoes and the monstrous helmet of the diver. As he stood on the ladder at last waiting to have the glass screwed on in front of the helmet before he climbed down to the wrecked Norwegian steamer lying near the tug at a depth of thirty-five feet, the captain came up.

"If you are afraid," he said, "you had better come back on board at once."

"But I am not," Keith cried impatiently.

Slowly he made his way down the rope ladder until he reached the firm yellow sand floor beneath. The air that was being pumped into the helmet made a faint tinkling noise in his ears. His feet showed a perverse tendency to rise from the bottom in spite of the weights attached to the shoes. Otherwise he felt quite at ease. It was a new world, with no perspectives, where he had to feel his way carefully . . . a world of pale greenish yellow, where sea weeds waved fantastically about him and the fishes treated him like any other rock. Cautiously he groped his way around, but there was not very much to see, and soon he decided to pull the line announcing his desire to ascend . . . not because he was tired or scared, but because he didn't know what to do with himself.

When he stood at the top of the ladder again, leaning over the railing, and the big helmet had come off, he said disgustedly:

"What a lot of fuss to make for five minutes below!"

"Oh, you did better than that," the first mate rejoined. "I timed you, and you were down exactly thirty-five minutes . . . one minute for each foot of the depth."

The story Keith wrote about his exploit was not very exciting. There was not much to write about, and he had not yet learned the journalistic art of "making soup on an old nail," as the Swedish saying has it. But the exploit itself caused a lot of talk,

and Dr. Rolling showed his satisfaction in various ways. The most significant of these to Keith was the editor's openly expressed desire to make him a permanent member of the staff. This, however, required a special appropriation, and Dr. Rolling explained that he was not sure of being able to get it from his board of directors. But even if he couldn't, he said to Keith, there would undoubtedly be openings on other newspapers.

Keith had not felt so happy for many years. It really looked as if he might get a firm foothold in his new profession, and as if this might bring him what he had so long looked for in vain . . . a decent livelihood and a form of work that kept him steadily interested.

And to the gang, with which he still spent most of his evenings, he talked as if nothing could be farther from his mind than leaving his own country for one where he would be a perfect stranger, handicapped both by his poor knowledge of the language and by his lack of a trade to which he could turn regardless of the language.

XXXII

ONE night the gang had a little more money than usual, and when the patient waiter at their favourite table in the Opera Café informed them at last that everybody else had left, and that there was not another drop to be had, some of this money remained.

"Let's break in somewhere and get a glass of hon-

est porter," shouted Eskil Larsson with a nervous pull at his Van Dyck beard. "I know a place. . . ."

That was enough. The gang was off, and Keith trailed along as usual . . . not because he cared, but because it was so much easier than making up his mind about going home. They marched up Government Street and were warned twice by stern policemen that singing was not in order at that time of the night. They turned into a side street, and then into another street, and then into still another, until Keith, who knew Stockholm almost as he knew his own room, began to wonder where he was.

A lowly white house with old-fashioned shutters before the ground-floor windows proved their goal. Larsson knocked three times at one of the shutters. There was some parleying, and then a door was opened. The gang poured into two dimly lighted rooms, where a woman in a sloppy morning dress told them they could have porter if they would promise to keep quiet.

Keith stared at that woman as if he had seen a ghost. She was rather good-looking, but her body was as sloppy as her dress, and her every movement was marked by an indolence that seemed quite out of keeping with her years. Her eyes were very blue, and Keith caught himself saying that they must have been pretty once, but now they were as lifeless as if their owner had long been dead.

"What's your name," Keith asked finally.

"Karin," the woman answered dully, her tone as lustreless as her eyes.

"Karin," Keith repeated, his tone disturbed by some memory that was struggling to break into conscious-

ness. The picture of a bare room came into his mind . . . a room containing only a single chair. Then he seemed to see a pair of blue eyes smiling at him, mysteriously, mischievously . . . he heard a bright laugh . . . the struggling memory broke through . . .

"Karin," he cried. "Karin of Merchant Street!"

The woman turned slowly to look at him.

"I lived there one night," she said. "And the police got me the next. That was the end of me."

"But you are still young," Keith protested, trying vainly to retrace in that woman's bloated features the Karin he had once met and known . . . oh, so fleetingly!

"I was young once," the woman said more to herself than to her visitors. "But that was long ago . . . very long ago . . . before they got me."

"Four years only," Keith rejoined after a hasty calculation, the result of which seemed improbable even to himself.

"Forty, you mean," the woman said, continuing mechanically to put bottles and glasses on the table. "Ten years for each month in the workhouse, and ten years more for the time that has gone since then. . . ."

Keith sat staring at her. A strange delusion seized him. He was not looking at another person, but at himself. What did it matter that she was a woman, and was called Karin, and was putting out bottles and glasses for a bunch of heedless youngsters, most of whom she had never seen before and would never see again . . . in spite of all external differences, there was Keith Wellander . . . a perfect image of what

he would be by and by, in slightly different forms and circumstances, of course, but nevertheless. . . .

"I am going home, boys," Keith exclaimed suddenly, grabbing his hat and making for the door regardless of the storm of protests raised by his comrades. In the doorway he turned for a moment.

"Good-bye, my youth," he said, not theatrically, but with a slight catch in his voice. Then he rushed out into the dimness of the deserted street outside.

XXXIII

TWO nights later Keith drifted into the Opera Café as usual. Eskil Larsson was there, and another young painter named Castergren, who always looked to Keith as if he were pushing his way through a wall. The rest of the gang had not shown up yet.

"You became frightfully sentimental the other night," said Larsson when Keith had ordered some coffee and another punch glass. "I wasn't aware you had had so much."

"I hadn't," Keith retorted a little hotly. "And I wasn't sentimental. I was merely disgusted. It was as if something had burst within me at the sight of that woman . . . oh, she used to have such pretty, smiling eyes once. . . . And all of a sudden the disgust that has been storing up within me for years came oozing out."

"Disgust with what," demanded Castergren, who hated generalizations.

"Everything. . . ." Keith made a vague, sweeping

gesture. "The country, the people, art, life, pleasure, myself . . . chiefly myself. . . ."

"Have another glass," Larsson urged. "That's what you need."

"Yes," Keith shot back scornfully. "That's the only remedy known here . . . another glass . . . for everything, from tuberculosis to chronic poverty. It has got so far that they live for nothing else . . . and they call it pleasure!"

"It isn't bad," Larsson admitted judgmatically, raising his glass.

But Keith was already off on another tangent.

"Pleasure, they call it. . . . That woman the other night was typical, you know . . . being a 'woman of pleasure.' And where does it lead to? Can't you see? Bloated indolence . . . at the best. And at the worst. . . ."

"Death," Castergren put in without moving a muscle in his face.

"Worse," Keith came back. "Death without anything to make up for it . . . death without anything left behind for what is still alive. Look at me . . . what have I done? Chased after so-called pleasure . . . and where am I? Do you know, I figured out the other day that, as things are going, it will take me eleven more years before I can hope to be earning my own living. Eleven years . . . barring accidents. And by that time my debts will be so big that I can never hope to pay them. Isn't that a fine future to look forward to?"

A long pause followed while the three young men puffed away silently, each one lost in his own thoughts. Keith was the first one to speak again.

"What is pleasure anyhow," he asked into space.

"Love . . . real love," Larsson answered promptly.

"No . . . work," Castergren declared with his customary angular emphasis.

"I guess you are right, both of you, each in his own way, as old Holberg says," Keith mused, looking from the dreamy face of Larsson to the sternly practical one of Castergren. "And yet the books speak of love as if it were the only thing. . . ."

"That's pure rot," Castergren broke in. "Work is the only thing . . . "

"Not the only one," Keith interposed. "Love, too . . . both together . . . those are the two essential things in life . . . what all of us must have . . . and what I have missed . . . both of them. What they call pleasure . . . drink, cards, women, anything . . . is nothing but a cheap substitute, and the more you have of it, the farther you get from the real thing . . . and I have got so far that . . . What in hell am I going to do, boys?"

"I am going to America," Larsson remarked unexpectedly.

"You," exclaimed Keith after staring at the other for a while. "Why should you? Your people can pay for your studies . . . and you are doing pretty well."

"There's a girl," Larsson answered shyly. "She isn't good enough for my family . . . I am going to America to marry her."

"I am going, too," Castergren put in. "To America, I mean . . . I have meant to tell you for some time."

His two friends gaped incredulously at him. Lars-

son's family was pretty well off, but that of Castergren was rich, and highly placed socially besides.

"I must get away from my family," Castergren explained. "It's my one chance of being myself. And I want to learn how to work . . . nobody really works here."

"That's not fair," Larsson objected. "Look at Lars Westman."

"What about Westman," Keith inquired eagerly, recalling the tall, slender, serious youngster that used to sit beside him in Grace Church.

"He's in the architect class," said Larsson. "Great chap . . . works like hell . . . and has brains, too. Everybody thinks he's going to make good . . . big."

"He will, I am sure," Keith muttered, his glance still backward turned.

"Yes, and there are a few others, of course . . . just to speak of our own field," Castergren persisted. "But the rest . . . look at them! Keith is right . . . bloated indolence . . . at forty they are old and fat without having accomplished anything at all."

At that moment Keith had a vision of a white-haired man with an eagle-like face lying back in a chair and talking about Lincoln and America.

"Listen, boys," Keith cried under the influence of that vision. "I am going too . . . it's the only thing to do . . . unless I am to become like all the rest."

"Talk," came interrogatively from Castergren.

"No," Keith retorted firmly, his mind made up with the suddenness so characteristic of him. "I am done with this country. I know I shall never amount to anything here . . . not even if I succeed in changing

my profession a second time. To get away is my only salvation, and America is the only country worth going to. Once I heard Björnson say that America is the only place where they know how to work. . . and Bob Ekman says that in America everybody is young. . . . I want to keep my youth, and the way to it lies through work. . . . It will cost money to go, but I think I can get it. . . ."

"Here's to our first meeting in New York," cried Larsson, raising his glass.

"Here's to America," Castergren chimed in, "and ourselves."

"Here's to love and work," Keith responded. "And youth!"

The next day he asked his father for the money and was told that he could have it.

He was then nearly twenty-five.

XXXIV

KEITH ran into Felix a few days before he was leaving, and they had to spend the evening together, of course, but both happened to be short of cash.

"Let's pool what we have," Felix suggested. "Now let's see . . . two-fifty-two . . . that's all right . . . a small beafsteak each at the Opera Café, a pint of punch and two coffees at Berns, and two tips . . . that leaves us two *öre* for emergencies."

When they were leaving the Opera Café after having had their beafsteaks, Felix set up a delighted yell:

"We've ten *öre* more than we thought. That gives me a cigar . . . for I know you don't care."

"Go ahead," urged Keith. "Smoking is an acquired virtue with me, and I can do without it."

Twenty minutes later they were seated on the rear balcony of Berns' Music Hall, overlooking the well filled floor below with the famous Meissner orchestra at the other end. The waiter had put the coffee and the punch on the little table between them, and Felix had taken the money from his pocket to pay, when Keith saw him suddenly put the money back and heard him say to the waiter:

"That's all right . . . we shall probably want more soon."

The moment the waiter was out of sight, Felix pulled a long face.

"I was wrong about that ten *öre* . . . or rather, I was right in my first count . . . and so we are that much short. What the deuce are we to do?"

"Go fishing, of course," said Keith with a gesture toward the crowded floor at their feet.

"Only way," Felix agreed. "Head, you . . . tail me . . . you go first."

Keith returned in a few minutes with five *kronor* borrowed from Engstrand, whom he discovered at a table full of his old colleagues all of whom wanted to keep him for the rest of the evening. Felix had disappeared. A moment later he returned, too, looking excited.

"I got fifteen," he cried, "from three different friends . . . one a minute. Now we'll make a night of it . . . and start by making out a scientific program."

The program made to mutual satisfaction, both fell to dreaming for a while.

"Isn't this just typical of Sweden," Felix burst out at last. "In five minutes we borrow twenty *kronor,* and tomorrow it will all be gone. . . . Do you mean to pay back that five?"

"Yes, I feel obliged in this case," Keith said. "But I admit that I am no better than the average in that respect."

"No one pays back debts of this kind," Felix went on, "and I think there is more owed in this than in any other way. Two of the men from whom I 'borrowed' owe me more money than I got out of them now. That's the way I always get back my money . . . I 'borrow' again. If I had dunned those chaps, I should not have got an *öre.* They would have sworn that they were broke. You Swedes. . . ."

Felix stopped short and leaned over the table toward Keith before he resumed: "Don't misunderstand me . . . I am as good a Swede as you. But I am of a different race all the same, and while a Swede myself, I can talk of Swedes as if I were an outsider. . . . You Swedes of the old race should never be permitted to handle money. They are all like you . . . honest to madness, but perfect children in money matters."

"Go on," Keith egged him. "That's good to hear. I thought myself the only one who failed in that way. . . ."

"No, you didn't," Felix cut him short. "You know better . . . I don't understand you. Every one of you spends money as if he were a millionaire. . . ."

"Not the peasants," Keith put in.

"No," Felix admitted, "the peasants earn and save. But the upper classes merely spend. I can't understand it, and I don't know where or how it is going to end."

"Yes, you are right," Keith mused. "That's one reason why I am going."

"Debts, you mean," queried Felix with a quick glance.

"No." Keith shook his head. "I have debts, of course . . . more than I ought to have . . . but mostly to tradesmen, and they are accustomed to wait in this country, so that's no reason why I should leave. No, I meant the lack of any sense of responsibility that lies back of all this borrowing and not paying back. . . . It's part of the atmosphere here, and I know it's too strong for me. I shall just go on like the rest as long as I stay here. And so I am going to a place where they know something about responsibility. Bob Ekman used an expression once that hit me hard. We were also talking about the fun we have here on borrowed money, and then he said: 'You have to earn your fun out there.' That's what I want to do . . . work hard and pay for my fun out of what my work earns."

"Yes," said Felix with raised glass. "*Skål* . . . you are right in going. You'll never do that while you stay here. *Skål* . . . and good luck to you!"

XXXV

THE steamer that was to take Keith to Copenhagen tooted a last warning. The gangway was taken in. Lines were dropped. The propeller was heard churning the water tentatively.

His father and mother stood on the stone quay gazing up at him. They looked small and old. The mother clung to her husband's arm, choking back a sob now and then. The father tried hard to look as if he didn't care.

"And be sure to write . . . for your mother's sake!"

Those were the last words Keith heard from his father, while his mother threw a final kiss after him.

Thus he had always seen them . . . thus he would always remember them . . . close together, but looking toward him, the son, the only child.

Would he see them again?

In the distance he caught a last glimpse of something white flickering . . . his mother's handkerchief . . . then the steamer turned a point and put on full speed.

Keith got a chair and placed it where he could have a good view to both sides . . . just as he had done more than three years earlier, when he was headed in the opposite direction . . . northward . . . to join the Sparrgren company. And now . . . now he was headed southward . . . and then westward . . . across a whole ocean . . . to a country where he had never been . . . where he knew nobody . . . where

they spoke a language which he did not really know. . . .

What did it mean?

Keith shook his head as if in answer to a question put by some one else.

He didn't know a thing about what his going would bring him out there. But . . . and then an old familiar image came back to him . . . it meant the opening of another gate . . . the passing of another hampering wall . . . for ever.

It meant a new start . . . new horizons . . . and new restrictions, new obstacles, he supposed . . . but of these he had seen nothing as yet. He was merely on the way . . . to the land of work, of youth, of the future . . . and perhaps it might also bring him a little real love. . . .

Suddenly he rose . . . another one of those quick decisions had taken shape in his mind. He was going to America to stay there . . . to become a part of it . . . to take root there. . . .

If that country was good enough to go to, as he was going, then it must also be good enough to stay in . . . until the future of which he had dreamt so long in vain was won.

THE END

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